THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

MAY, 1956

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GREEN PARADISE

and

9

New stories

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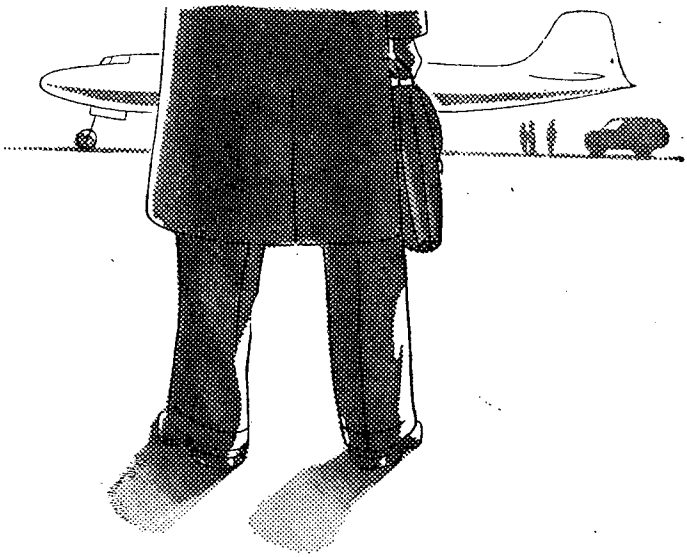

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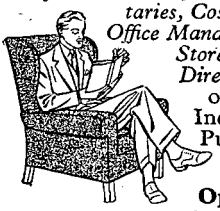

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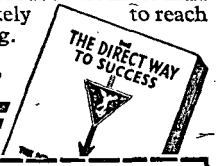

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ARGOSY

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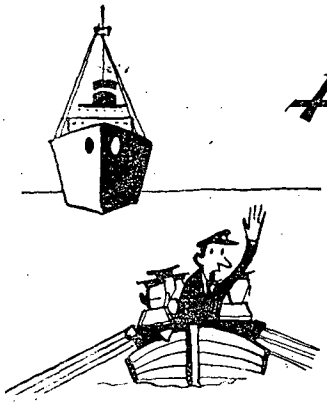

ARGOSY Log Book

THE kind of person we like is the Argosy reader who sits down in a fit of white-hot enthusiasm (or rage, maybe) and dashes off a letter telling us what's wrong (or right) with Argosy. We offer a prize of two guineas for the best letter received and hope to see some candid, even blistering opinions, though pats on the back are welcome, too. Under ten lines, please.

John Steinbeck needs no introduction to our readers who remember his *Sweet Thursday*, but to recap: Steinbeck is author of many best-sellers, including *Of Mice and Men*, *The Moon is Down*; he is fifty-four, before taking to writing tried his hand as labourer, seaman, ranch hand, carpenter's mate; and sprang to fame with *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In *Green Paradise*, Steinbeck's new story, he abandons his usual Californian home ground and takes readers to Ireland, land of mist, mountains, and misunderstandings. You'll find it on page 41.

Crabbing an idea from a well-known radio programme: if you were marooned on a desert island with ten short stories as your only reading matter, which ten would you pick? Well-loved classics such as Maupassant's *Necklace* or Galsworthy's *Apple Tree*? Or has something more modern caught your imagination? Following old Argosy tradition, we are going to reprint a series of our own greatest stories.

We are leading off next month with **Theodore Sturgeon**'s story *Bianca's Hands*, a brilliant and terrifying glance at the uncanny. It won the first prize in our £250 competition in May 1947, and has left a haunting impression in many a mind. *What Argosy story would you like to see reprinted?* Send your vote or

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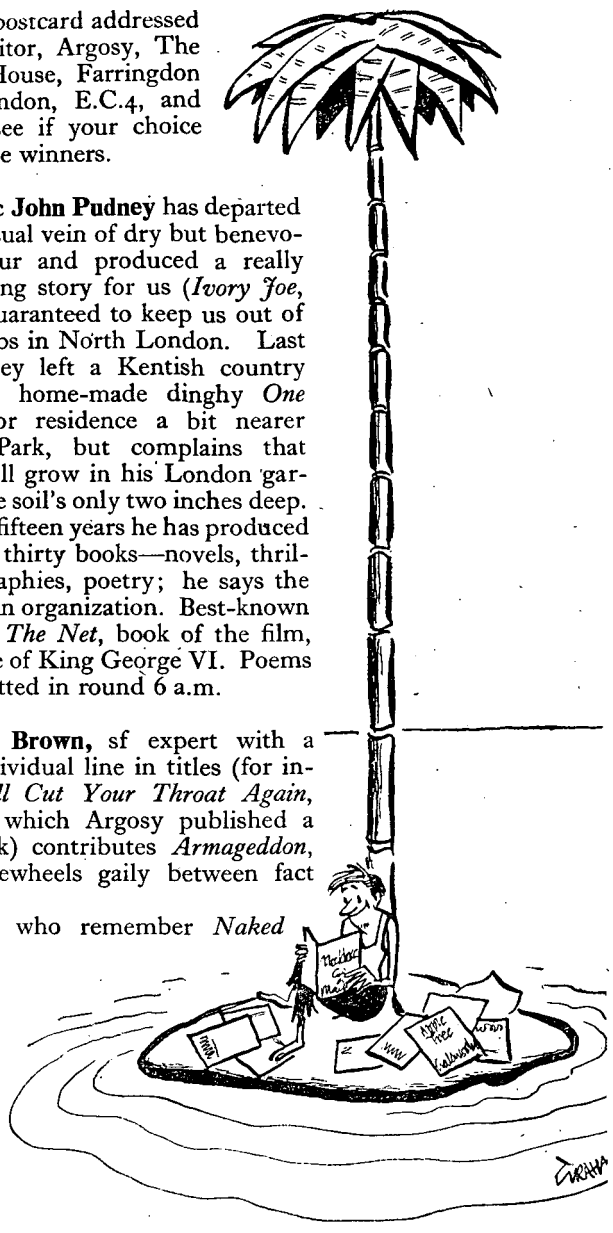
votes on a postcard addressed to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and watch to see if your choice is one of the winners.

Cherubic **John Pudney** has departed from his usual vein of dry but benevolent humour and produced a really spine-chilling story for us (*Ivory Joe*, page 95) guaranteed to keep us out of strange pubs in North London. Last year Pudney left a Kentish country house and home-made dinghy *One O'Clock* for residence a bit nearer Regent's Park, but complains that nothing will grow in his London garden, for the soil's only two inches deep. In the last fifteen years he has produced more than thirty books—novels, thrillers, biographies, poetry; he says the secret lies in organization. Best-known works are *The Net*, book of the film, and his life of King George VI. Poems must be fitted in round 6 a.m.

Fredric Brown, sf expert with a highly individual line in titles (for instance, *I'll Cut Your Throat Again, Kathleen*, which Argosy published a while back) contributes *Armageddon*, which freewheels gaily between fact and fancy.

Readers who remember *Naked*



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Truth will know all about **Robert Standish**'s ability to land his characters in an apparently hopeless situation and then whip them out of it with sleight-of-hand dexterity. He has done it again in *Pancho's Gift*, set in torrid, colourful Mexico, which keeps you guessing till zero minute. Standish has written some well-known novels—*The Small General*, for instance, and *Elephant Walk*.

Brian Cleeve is a dab at creating sultry, smouldering heroines, the sort that practically spring out of the page. His new story, *The Revenge of Big Michael*, on page 19, leads through jealousy to a breathless climax on a precipice overhanging an Irish lake. Cleeve, who is thirty-six, told himself stories when on watch in the Merchant Navy, has written two novels, *The Far Hills* and *Portrait of My Country*.

The other day we noticed that the elderly lady sitting next to us in the bus was reading a copy of Argosy. We asked her what she liked about the magazine. "I take it along to my little grandson," she said, "it's just the right size for him." "Oh?" "He uses the pages for making paper aeroplanes." Somewhat shattered by this encounter, we wish to reiterate that Argosy is for the *men* of the family—women and children last.

JOHN SILVER

Women and children last

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PANCHO'S GIFT

What was one more murder to a man like that

by ROBERT STANDISH

A FEW months ago I was at one of those huge impersonal cocktail parties—there must have been a hundred and fifty guests where fifty might have been comfortable—nobody seemed to know anybody else, or just what the party was in aid of. Observing a familiar face in an alcove, I began to push my way through the scrum towards it, moving at the rate of some three feet per minute.

"Who," said a woman's voice close to my left ear, "would you consider the most interesting—or perhaps I should say the most striking—person you have ever met?"

In retrospect, I doubt whether the question was being put to me, but I heard myself reply without hesitation, "Pancho de Sandoval, of course!" Just then the key log in the jam shifted, with the result that my questioner moved in one direction while I moved in the other. I never even saw her face.

Much later that evening I pondered my reply, coming to the conclusion that, even if given some hours for thought, I would have made the same reply. I won't say that Pancho de Sandoval is the most interesting, but I will say that he was the most striking person I ever met. Let me begin at the end by recounting the circumstances of our last meeting.

Nearly three years ago, hot, thirsty, and dirty after a long drive to the south of Mexico City, getting on towards the border of Guatemala, I stopped my car near the top of a high pass. In the middle of the dusty road, almost underneath a sign which said Posada de Potaltec, was a strange and horrible sight. At least a hundred vultures were feeding on the carcass of a dead horse. There was just room for me to pass and then swing out in order to enter the gates of the hotel.

I was soon grateful for the restful twilight of a huge vaulted bedroom. The bleached landscape, bathed in the strange lemon-coloured light characteristic of the high mountains in Mexico, is trying to the eyes. A cool shower and some cold beer soon worked wonders, and while the long shadows filtered away, filling

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the valleys with purple darkness, I set out to explore the Posada and its lovely gardens.

The Posada is not, frankly, an establishment I would recommend to my more fastidious friends, but the building is old and graceful—authentic sixteenth century—built of mellowed reddish sandstone. The plumbing, I would judge, was considered substandard in the time of Cortés.

Dinner made me decide to get on the road early the following morning, but I did not know then that I had burnt out the generator of the car. The main dish of dinner consisted of a lot of unidentifiable objects swimming in an unholy liquid which looked like black strap molasses and tasted like hell fire. I ate an omelet, some bread, and fruit.

Choosing a chair with a good light for reading, I made myself comfortable in the patio. The night was full of pleasant sounds. A donkey brayed. Dogs barked. There came the thin wail of an infant crying, while in the background was the gobbling of turkeys disturbed by lights, and the distant tinkling of a guitar, an instrument that has to be distant to be tolerable.

Then out of the darkness, swelling like organ music, came a baritone voice of infinite sweetness, singing a song with a familiar Spanish lilt. I had heard the song and the voice many times before. But when and where?

The voice went from song to song, sometimes pitched low and sometimes filling the night with joy and melody. Where, where, where had I heard that voice before?

Then I remembered, and was reminded of the swift passage of the years.

In Greenwich Village, a little before the repeal of Prohibition, were three small restaurants next door to each other in a terrace of brownstone houses. One of them was called The Blue Danube, another Le Petit Coin de France, while the third was called Old Mexico. What the general public did not know, and I only learnt recently, was that these three restaurants shared one kitchen.

The cook, who was Chinese, would make a stew. A ladleful of this, well sprinkled with paprika, appeared at the Blue Danube as Genuine Hungarian Goulash. The same stew, decorated with a sprig of parsley and served on a tricolour tablecloth, was sent up to Le Petit Coin de France where, after the waiter had said abracadabra three times, it was called Ragoût à la Catalane. At the Old Mexico, some hell-fire sauce, some burnt sugar, and a dash or two of god-help-us turned the same stew into a " Typical Mexican " dish, served with two alleged tortillas that

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resembled beige rubber bathmats and did duty as crêpes Suzette at Le Petit Coin de France.

The wretched victim upstairs would skin the roof off his mouth and pretend to his girl-friend that he enjoyed it. But *she* would enjoy herself, sipping bathtub gin and orange juice and listening to Pancho de Sandoval's resonant baritone and reading into its passionate tones meanings that were not there. Every woman who went to Old Mexico thought that Pancho was singing to her. But he wasn't. Pancho was singing to Pancho.

In those days Pancho had a story that he told to everyone. He told it to me at least four times. It seems that on the day he was born his father went out into the garden and climbed into a hammock, completely exhausted by the ordeal. Suddenly, from the bough of a jacaranda tree in full bloom, there flew a strange bird whose back and wings were bright blue and whose breast was a golden yellow. "Ho there, you fat Mexican man," the bird said, "how is that new-born son of yours?"

"Mind your own business!" replied Pancho's father, composing himself for sleep.

"Hey there, wake up!" called the bird loudly. "I have a gift for your son, so open the window of the room where he sleeps."

"What is this gift you have for him?" asked Pancho's father suspiciously.

"It is the most precious gift a man can have—the gift of saying the right thing at the right time. Hurry, because I must give it to him before he awakens from his first sleep . . ."

"All right," said Pancho's father, pointing to the house. "That is the room, and the window is already open . . . but don't wake the child and don't wake me, either." And with that Pancho's father went to sleep, without ever being quite certain whether or not the bird had conferred the Gift upon Pancho.

Pancho must have told that story to hundreds, even thousands of people, but although they believed much less probable things every day of their lives, most of them were inclined to laugh it off as a fairy-tale. What do I think? Well, I am not even now quite sure, but in the light of subsequent events I am inclined to give Pancho's father the benefit of the doubt.

Up at Potaltec, in the patio of the Posada, I sat on entranced while Pancho's voice—which had become a little fruity with the years—filled the night with sweetness and sound, dredging to the surface of memory people and incidents lost for many years. Voices and perfumes! What potent spurs they are to memory!

The voice came closer until it seemed to fill the patio. "Hullo, Pancho," I said softly between songs, "is this the garden where the blue bird with yellow wings brought you the Gift?"

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Pancho's chubby face became wreathed in smiles. "It is you, señor, and after all these years!" he said caressingly, manœuvring to get on the other side of the light in order to see who I was, because my face was completely in the shadow. "Only a few days ago I was thinking of you, señor, wondering what had happened . . . And now, what joy! Let us drink a glass of tequila together and talk of old times."

"I'll stick to beer, thanks!" I said hastily. To me, tequila tastes like Grade C. embalming fluid and caustic soda, with an overtone of chlorinated drains. People who have had their taste buds completely cauterized by eating Mexican food tell me that it is delicious.

I am prepared to go on oath that three beers and six tequilas later, Pancho didn't know me from the proverbial hole in the ground, but after he had wormed out of me the admission that in my undiscriminating youth I had been misguided enough to eat at the Old Mexico, he was on safer ground. We chatted amiably of this and that, and at ten o'clock I went to bed.

By keeping the light on all night and using plenty of D.D.T., I managed to keep all but the most ferocious bugs at bay, and was fortunate enough to doze off several times just before dawn. When I went for an early-morning stroll, the vultures were making their breakfast off what was left of the horse. I suggested to Pancho that this was perhaps not the best possible advertisement for his Posada.

"God sent the vultures, señor," he replied equably, "to save poor people from paying taxes for street-cleaning."

Inwardly, I damned Pancho. Perhaps it was the Gift that enabled him to say such unarguable things. In countries where there were heavy taxes for street-cleaning, dead dogs and cats were often left where they were for longer than the vultures would have left them.

That afternoon, when I learnt the bad news about the generator from the garage, I returned to the Posada at the hour of the siesta. Pancho was snoring in his hammock on the shady side of the patio. A son was in another close to him, while a grandson named Tomas, the apple of Pancho's eye, sat scratching himself by the fountain. He was a handsome, sultry-looking boy of some seventeen years of age.

I found a chair behind a clump of rubber plants, where I could see without being seen. I was soon rewarded.

Around four o'clock a cloud of dust came through the gates, and a car bearing Kansas number-plates stopped in the shade of a spreading tree. Four women got out of the car and entered the patio. One was a very pretty girl of about twenty-two. Two

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others, a year or two older, were plain. The fourth member of the party was a middle-aged woman with sad, disillusioned eyes and the deep-etched lines of discontent around her mouth. She was, I judged, around forty-five, with the bleak look of those who believe that life has passed them by.

The Posada slumbered on.

"Don't we get any service around here?" asked the youngest member of the party in a sharp voice. One of the plain girls walked across to where the old mission bell-rope dangled invitingly. She pulled it hard, filling the afternoon with its mellow tone.

Only Tomas awoke. He disappeared into the back premises, returning a moment later combing his black greasy hair and carrying a tray on which were displayed some trumpery silver ornaments. Simultaneously, a maidservant arrived and took the order for four beers.

Tomas advanced with his tray. "You want some silver t'ing . . . ver' cheap? I show you."

"Go away!" said the oldest woman.

"Beat it!" said another.

"Scram!" said the youngest almost ferociously.

Tomas went back to sleep. But he was soon awakened by Pancho, who had been feigning sleep and had evidently witnessed the entire incident. Although I could not understand what passed between them, it was quite evident that Pancho was trying to improve the lad's selling technique.

I watched Pancho take from the tray a pair of silver ear-rings that Tomas had tried to sell to me for forty pesos—at that time nearly five dollars—which was, presumably, at least twice their value.

The four women, meanwhile, had finished their beers and were ordering something to eat. Pancho, fingering the shoddy ear-rings lovingly, watched them through the long lashes of his half-closed eyes, waiting for a favourable moment. This was going to be good. Then, climbing slowly out of his hammock, he proceeded to give his grandson a lesson in the ancient art of salesmanship, which is not, if you will reflect upon the matter, so very far removed from the Gift.

I count myself privileged to have seen what followed. It was salesmanship of such a high order that it was almost devilish. There was something about the way Pancho handled those tawdry ear-rings that invested them with an altogether fictitious value.

The four women looked up from their revolting food with a lack of interest amounting to blank hostility. Tomas, lurking in the background, had a malicious glint in his eyes.

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Smiling his gentle, serene smile, Pancho advanced unflinchingly. "Excuse me, señorita," said Pancho, addressing himself to the oldest woman at the table, "but my grandson is young and foolish. You are not angry?"

"Why should I be angry? He wasn't rude."

"It is rude, señorita," said Pancho in gentle reproof, "to offer to a lady like yourself the . . . rubbish he sells to the tourists who come by the bus. It is foolish also, for there is a man in the village who makes truly beautiful things of silver. Look at these ear-rings, señorita—they are made by an artist. The Mexican silver-worker, you must understand, inherits the ancient skill of his Aztec ancestors as well as that of Africa, left behind in Spain when the Moors were expelled. They are beautiful, are they not, señorita?"

Now for the first time since she had stepped out of the car, the Kansas woman's eyes were alight with interest. She smiled gently, and the lines of discontent around her mouth seemed to vanish. "How much are you asking for them?" she said softly.

"I did not bring them for you to buy, señorita," said Pancho, his voice full of reproach, "but only to admire."

"They are beautiful . . . And they are not for sale?"

"Most things are for sale in Mexico, señorita," said Pancho sadly, "because we are so poor. These were made by a silversmith in the village as a gift for his daughter, who now lives in Tampico. He is proud of them and he wanted me to admire them. It is possible that he would sell you these and make another pair for his daughter . . . but I warn you, señorita, that he will probably ask a foolish price."

"Please find out for me how much they are, señor," she said, trying to conceal her eagerness. "I would like to buy them."

I don't know what Pancho said to the small boy who was scratching himself by the gate, but he soon trotted off in the direction of the village, his feet sending up spurts of dust as he ran. He returned seven or eight minutes later with a packet of cigarettes which, I am convinced, was the sole purpose of his errand.

"It is as I said, señorita," said Pancho sadly, "the man asks a foolish price—a price I cannot permit you to pay. It shall not be said that Pancho de Sandoval forgets his duty to his guests."

"How much does he ask for them?"

"Such foolishness, señorita! He asks four hundred pesos . . . four hundred! They are not worth more than half of that. Why, I know a silversmith in Mexico City on the Avenida . . ."

"Would he accept two hundred, do you think?" asked the other wistfully.

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" We can ask, señorita, we can ask."

Once more the small boy trotted off to the village. Several times I was tempted to intervene and to tell that sad-eyed woman that the identical ear-rings had been offered to me for forty pesos. But I am glad now that the little streak of wisdom in me bade me desist.

It is hardly necessary to add that the price of two hundred pesos was acceptable to the non-existent silversmith and that the ear-rings changed hands at that figure. While Pancho was exploiting his Gift I felt faintly sick. It put me in mind of a rabbit being hypnotized by a snake.

" Why aren't you a millionaire, Pancho? " I asked him when the Kansas car had disappeared into the dust whence it came. " You should be living in a Park Avenue apartment with a country home on Long Island."

" And the ulcers, what of them? To be rich is not my ambition, señor. Me, I sleep ten hours every day because I have a good digestion . . . I do not sell things to tourists, you know. Today it was just to give a lesson to Tomas."

" If he learns the lesson," I said coldly, " he will end up a millionaire—or in prison."

" You think I am a big thief, señor," said Pancho, wrapping the mantle of his dignity around him, " but it is not so. Two hundred pesos "—I wish I could convey the contempt in his voice—" what is that? To me it is nothing. You forget that it was the lady who made the great bargain. Do you not understand that during the years to come, whenever she puts up her hands to touch those ear-rings, or sees them in the mirror of her bedroom in that lonely Kansas farmhouse, she will remember a posada on a mountain pass in Mexico, the smell of the dust, the pale blue of the sky, and the dark blue of the jacaranda . . . yes, and the bones of the horse at the gate. But more than these, she will remember the fat Mexican man who smiled at her . . . and at those times she will blush and she will whisper, ' That fat man who smiled . . . he called me señorita! '

" The two hundred pesos, señor, are nothing—nothing to me and nothing to her. But the memories . . . ah! the memories, they are everything, and she will have them long, long after the two hundred pesos have gone to buy tequila."

And the devil of it was, I realized, that Pancho was right. In exchange for a trifling sum of money she had bought an imperishable memory. To that sad-eyed woman who had come in a cloud of dust Mexico would not spell bullfights and chili con carne, vast open spaces bathed in lemon-coloured light, the harsh reds of the poinsettia and the bougainvillaea, or the little towns where

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small pigs squealed in the cobbled streets as they pounced on unspeakable delicacies . . . No, Mexico, as Pancho had had the wit to realize, would always be the place where a fat Mexican, contrary to established custom, had ignored in her favour three young women, at least one of whom was pretty—and as proof there would always be the silver ear-rings.

Well, you tell me. Did Pancho, or didn't he, possess the Gift?

It's funny the tricks that memory plays. During the remainder of that day I remembered all kinds of small incidents about Pancho, trifles in themselves, which came back fresh and bright over the gulf of the twenty years since I had last seen him. But I was conscious all the time that while the trifles remained in memory, something big—something intensely dramatic—had faded.

The sun had dipped behind the jagged mountains before I remembered, and then I marvelled that it had been possible to forget, for the story had made the headlines before, like Pancho, it had dropped out of sight.

A bright young reporter had been the first to sense the inwardness of the story, and his editor had asked in flaring type: WHAT DID PANCHO SAY TO SOURPUSS GUARINO? The police had asked that, too, asked it a thousand times with a bright light shining in Pancho's eyes. But the Gift, which enabled him to say the right thing at the right time, had also given him the wit to know when silence was golden.

The night it all happened I had gone with a girl to dine at the Old Mexico. Her name has slipped from memory, too, but she was a nice girl. She worked in the art department at one of the big advertising agencies . . . well, it doesn't matter now. We arrived to find it closed. From a group of excited people in the street we heard various garbled and embroidered accounts of what had happened a couple of hours previously, learning the rest from the morning papers.

Pancho had been on his way to work, walking along one of the turnings off Washington Square. Some twenty yards ahead of him he saw a man cross the street towards a parked car in which were three men. What startled Pancho was the pistol in the man's hand. And then he recognized the man. It was Sourpuss Guarino, who was at that time enjoying his little moment of fame. He bore the reputation of being a ferocious killer but, thanks to a clever lawyer, nobody had been able to prove that to the satisfaction of a judge and jury.

There was plenty of time for Pancho to have ducked for cover, but he did not do so. Instead, as he explained later, fascinated

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with horror and seemingly unable to control his muscles, he walked on slowly towards the impending tragedy. And then, according to an onlooker who saw everything from a fourth-floor window, Pancho stopped dead a few feet from the car, standing rigidly at attention with fingers by his side extending downwards. He remained like that.

Sourpuss Guarino, meanwhile, opened the door of the car and fired three shots at the occupants, killing all three instantly. He then turned to see Pancho standing beside him, the only witness close enough to have identified him as the killer.

The street held its breath waiting for the fourth shot. So, one may believe, did Pancho.

The fourth-floor witness, closely questioned by the police later, stated that he saw Pancho's lips move as he said something to the killer, whose face he never saw. The killer's arm dropped, and Pancho, still in his curiously rigid posture, as though paralysed with fright, remained motionless.

Sourpuss Guarino was then observed to reach into his pocket, withdraw something that looked like paper money, and stuff it into Pancho's breast pocket, before turning on his heel and making his escape in a car that was waiting a few yards away with the engine running and an accomplice at the wheel.

Pancho remained quite still until the car was out of sight, when he was seen to glance at the money in his breast pocket—two hundred-dollar bills—and put it in his left-hand trouser pocket. Another witness said that at this moment Pancho was smiling.

The police arrived on the scene a few moments later, hustling Pancho off with them for questioning. Asked if he could identify the killer if he saw him again, Pancho said that he knew him to be Sourpuss Guarino. Why, the police wanted to know, since Pancho and Sourpuss apparently knew each other, had Sourpuss left him alive to testify against him?

It was a reasonable question to which Pancho replied that he was unknown to Sourpuss, who had evidently not believed that he had been recognized. How was it, the police wanted to know next, that Pancho was able to make the identification with such apparent certainty? To this, Pancho replied, Sourpuss was a well-known criminal whose picture had appeared in the press several times.

The police laid a drag-net for Sourpuss who, if Pancho had spoken the truth, would believe that he had not been recognized. The police located Sourpuss that night in a waterfront bar in Brooklyn, and in the gun battle that followed, he fell, riddled with bullets, and died on the way to hospital.

It was not until then that the fourth-floor witness came forward

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to say that he had seen Pancho say something to Sourpuss. Pancho, now in grave danger of being regarded as an accomplice, was called upon to disclose what it was he had said to Sourpuss to cause that merciless killer to drop his arm and refrain from firing the fourth shot.

For nearly a week, New Yorkers, like the police, were asking, "What did Pancho say to Sourpuss?" They would have continued longer, probably, had not some other sensation come along to drive the story off the front pages. The question never was answered. The Old Mexico closed its doors after that, and Pancho faded from sight.

That night, when Pancho's baritone was filling the patio of his Posada, I invited him to drink some tequila at my expense. I stuck to beer.

"Why did Sourpuss give you that money, Pancho?" I asked later.

"Many people have asked me that, señor, but not for a long time now."

"You had really seen him before?"

"Many times, señor, many times."

"But Sourpuss did not know you, Pancho. How was that?"

"It does not matter now, señor," said Pancho with a smile, "but then it mattered much. My sister, who was a nurse at the hospital where Sourpuss had been for six weeks, had pointed him out to me in the garden. His was a bad face, one which a man would not easily forget. It was for my sister's sake that I said nothing, for I did not want the vengeance of the gang to fall upon her . . ."

A frown crossed Pancho's usually serene brow, transforming the amiable clown into a man wary and alert, like a wild animal. I had evoked unpleasant memories.

"Sourpuss was my sister's last patient," Pancho continued after a while. "She told me one night that she hated him so much that she hoped he would never get better, and that, I do not have to tell you, señor, is a bad way for a nurse to think. To a nurse, or to a doctor, it should not matter whether a man is good or bad. It should only matter that he is ill, is it not so?"

"What had been wrong with him?" I asked.

"He had had an operation on his eyes, señor, and for a little time it seemed that he would go blind. That is why he did not recognize me in the street. For weeks, so my sister said, it was terrible to be near him, for he cursed God and said many evil things, and on the day when the doctors told him he would have his sight he forgot to thank God."

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" What a strange coincidence," I murmured, " that you of all men should be there to see him commit murder! "

" It was for me a happy coincidence, señor, for it is because of what happened that day that I am now the owner of this fine Posada . . ."

I could not follow the train of thought and said so.

" On the previous day, señor," continued Pancho, " although I did not know it then, Sourpuss had held up a bank in New Jersey, and a reward of twenty-five thousand dollars had been offered for him, dead or alive. That night, after Sourpuss had been shot, the police found in Sourpuss's hide-out the money from the bank hold-up. There was much argument, but at the finish I was given half the reward; the other half went to the informer who had told the police of Sourpuss's hide-out in Brooklyn.

" As soon as I had the money, because I was afraid, I brought my sister back to Mexico. But what does it matter, señor? It was all such a long time ago . . ."

Pancho helped himself to another glass of tequila.

" Only one more question, Pancho," I said coaxingly. " After all this time, as you say, it doesn't matter, but even so, I would like to know what it was you said to Sourpuss. What it was that caused him to lower his pistol and so leave alive the one witness who would be able to identify and describe him. What was it, Pancho? "

" I told you, did I not, señor," said Pancho savouring his words pleasurably, " that on the day when I was born a beautiful blue bird with golden yellow wings flew down from a jacaranda? "

" Yes, Pancho. You told me that for the first time more than twenty years ago. I didn't believe it then, but now . . . well, now I am not so sure."

" It is true, señor, it is true. I can take you tomorrow to see the jacaranda tree—it is still standing in the garden of the house where I was born—and you may believe that it was the Gift that saved my life and told me the right thing—the only thing to say. One, two, three seconds and it would have been too late, señor, and only the Gift could save me. Believe me, señor, those were long seconds . . .

" You are sure that you will not take a glass of tequila? Well, each man knows best. As I was saying, in those seconds I had to find the way to the heart of a man who had no heart—a killer, a mad dog."

" What did you say to him, Pancho? " I asked, conscious that the tension was building up unbearably.

I could hear the beating of my own heart and all because of a

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forgotten twenty-year-old New York street drama that hadn't touched me.

"Sourpuss had his pistol pointed straight for my stomach, señor," continued Pancho, "and even then, you will remember, it was a large stomach—too large for him to miss. I had to say something that would stop him from pulling the trigger . . . but what? Then, like the sun as he comes up over the mountains, only many times more quick, I saw a great light and I was sure then, and for the first time, that my father had not lied and that the blue bird with the yellow wings had brought me the Gift. I was sure then, señor, quite sure."

"What did you say, Pancho?" I asked in a cracked voice. "He had to kill you . . . he simply had to. What did one more murder mean to a man like that?"

"There was only one way to that man's pity, señor," said Pancho in a strained voice, for I think the memory of his fear had dried his mouth, "and because I possessed the Gift, I found that way . . ."

"What did you say, man?" I heard myself shout.

"'Can you spare a few coppers for a blind man, mister?' I asked him. Come with me tomorrow, señor, and I will show you the jacaranda tree . . ."

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THE REVENGE OF BIG MICHAEL

**The white arms of her—
the black heart**

by BRIAN CLEEVE

YOU could feel the warmth of her as you came in the door of the bar; a sullen, smouldering sort of warmth like a banked furnace with hell fire underneath.

Dark hair to her shoulders and dark thinking eyes; a mouth like a crushed fruit, and white, rounded, milk-smooth arms folded on the mahogany.

She'd look up as you came in, and then, when she saw who it was, look down again, waiting a long sullen moment before she'd take your order.

A lot of men wouldn't stand for it, and drank across the street in Nolan's, but she didn't care, and Big Michael her husband didn't care either because for every one that kept away because of Maeve Ryan, there were two that came because of her, slinking into the bar just to look at her while they drank their pints of stout; the white arms of her and the full breast and the skin like standing cream.

But they didn't look too close if Big Michael was there. It wouldn't have been wise.

He was a strange man, Big Michael. Not the ordinary sort of bully that you get in villages like ours; the man that can down more whisky and fight more men than anyone for ten miles round. I never saw him lift his hand in anger. When he wanted to punish a man he did it coldly, waiting his chance longer than anyone else I ever knew. He'd wait a year, ten years, and then his chance would come and he'd close those huge black hairy fists on a man's life and break it.

Don't ask me how he did it. But men that crossed Big Michael ended badly.

One man had stolen goods found buried under his kitchen floor although I'd have sworn that he was never a thief. Sometimes the man just lost his job, in a place where jobs are hard to come by a second time. Because besides the Bar, which was his

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own, Big Michael Ryan was bailiff of Lord Glenlure's land—twenty miles of pasture and heather running between our village, beside Glenlure Lake, and the sea.

Glenlure had never bothered him and Big Michael did as he pleased; hired and fired and ruled and made money out of the stewardship—more money than Glenlure ever made from ownership, if the stories were true. And with some of that money Ryan bought Maeve Conlan away from her father and Fergus Raftery.

I think she was pleased enough to be bought at first. I remember the days after the wedding—there was no honeymoon because Big Michael loved his power too much to leave it for a week of rubbishing in Dublin over women's things—and I remember Maeve Ryan, as she had become, running her hands on the mahogany of Ryan's bar, the hands smooth and white and softly warm and the bar strong and shining like old, dark glass with blood beneath it. "*Mine*," she was whispering, "*all mine*."

I came in then, and that was the only time in my life that I ever got a smile from Maeve; slow and sleepy, like a cat waking. "It's mine," she whispered to me, "all mine now," and her mouth was warm and half opening. If it had been anyone else that had married her I'd have been sorry for him in that moment. It was as if she was hungry for the very essence of things and wanted the blood from their heart. If she had her way with a man he'd end up an empty husk, and she bored with him and hungry for someone else.

But not with Big Michael, surely. Woman or man or devil, it was the same to him. He took what he wanted and broke the rest, and within a month she was leaning on the bar as I've told you, white arms folded and mouth sullen, and dark eyes full of thinking. And often enough when she pulled the taps she moved slow and stiff, as if the marks of her husband's leather belt were across her back.

It was then that Fergus Raftery came back to her.

There had always been something between them since they were old enough to care about such things. Something. Nothing. Nothing serious, that is, because whatever her father was, which wasn't much, Maeve knew her value, and it was higher than Fergus could ever afford to pay. Higher than anyone in the countryside could afford except Big Michael. But there had been kisses, and from what came after maybe there had been more than kisses.

Certainly when the marriage came Fergus let on that he was broken-hearted; but next morning he was laughing, and wishing her the devil's luck, and drinking again across in Nolan's,

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and that was that, or so we thought. There were more girls than Maeve if Fergus wanted them. And to tell you the truth I don't think there was a girl in Ireland Fergus cared for enough to give up a night's poaching for the sake of her.

He lived by himself on the far side of the lake, off the Glenlure land, and poached where he wanted, a ragged black shadow of a dog at his heels; and if he ever did a day's honest work in his life, I never saw him do it. But I liked him just the same.

I've a small bit of a shop at the bottom of the village street, selling saucepans and fly-rods and anything else you might want if you were ever passing, and when Fergus came in, it was like sunlight through a dusty window.

He wasn't tall, but he held himself so straight that he seemed taller than he was and he carried light on his head like that fire that gathers on ship's masts in a storm; black hair with red in it that you might call dark auburn in a woman. I heard a woman tourist once calling it Stuart hair and saying that he was the living likeness of some picture of a prince she had at home, and I wouldn't be surprised. Especially when I heard later that the prince she meant came to no good and took to drink.

But I liked him in spite of the ruinous uselessness of him. I was always glad to see him coming down the street towards my door, walking light as an Indian, the dog drifting along at his heels, nose to ground and tail drooping as if it lived on porridge and never knew what cock pheasant smelt like out of season.

The one place I wasn't glad to see him go was Ryan's Bar. It was a month or so after the marriage that he came to Maeve again, dropping in casually, with his eyes smiling and the dog squeezing in the swing door after him. As he came in, Maeve's face lit up for an instant, as a banked fire might yield a sudden gleam from its white-hot heart. There wasn't a man in the Bar that didn't notice and, men being what they are, there wasn't a man lacking to run and tell Ryan what he had seen.

I saw him go, and sat waiting for what would happen, praying under my breath. Because as I've told you, I liked Fergus Raftery and I didn't want to see him broken, above all not by a woman like Maeve. But I didn't bother telling him it'd be wise to leave. You might as well tell a bird to leave the corn. He stood leaning against the bar, a small whisky in his right hand and his left across the mahogany, touching Maeve's wrist.

I remember how dark his fingers looked against her whiteness. Too white, for my stomach. Like something that lives by night and shuns the sunlight. Like leprosy. But Fergus touched her skin as if he was parting grass to set a pheasant snare; softly and breathlessly. You'd think he'd never seen her before.

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Then Ryan came, walking slowly down the passage towards the bar, like a lion coming through the forest. The man who had fetched him opened the door for him, and I saw his jackal shadow on the glass for a moment until he vanished, scuttling out of harm's way.

Most of the men in the bar touched their forelocks to Ryan and mumbled a greeting, but Fergus only looked up and grinned. He didn't even take his hand off Maeve's arm. It was she that drew her arm away, with a sideways look at her husband, the sullenness falling back on her like a cloud covering the moon, and a dark smoulder of hatred in her eyes.

"I thought you drank in Nolan's," said Ryan, and the bar grew very still, men setting their glasses down softly.

"Sometimes," said Fergus gently, "sometimes." And he rolled the whisky glass slowly to and fro, the rim against the mahogany where one tap would break it. Fergus had never heard of the Marquess of Queensberry. Then, neither had Ryan.

But as I've said, Ryan wasn't a man to start that kind of trouble over a hasty word, and certainly not in his own bar with a licence to lose. His voice stayed quiet and heavy, not a whisper of difference in it.

"I've the right to refuse to serve a man if I think fit and you'll not drink here again," was all he said.

Then he turned to Maeve, and there was an ugly sort of promise in his eyes.

"Do you hear that, woman? Then heed it, and get to bed. I'll close the Bar tonight."

He jerked his head at Fergus. "Don't come here again or there'll be trouble." With that, he turned his back and began setting the bottles straight in front of the long mirror behind the bar.

For a long moment I thought that Fergus was going to make trouble there and then. But at last he set down his empty glass very quietly on the counter and turned away, snapping his fingers for the dog to follow him. It followed him all right, but as the pair of them went out of the swing door it lifted its leg against the panelling. And one of the men laughed.

That was the nearest I ever saw Big Michael come to losing control of himself. He was across the room before the dog had lowered its leg to the ground, and his own foot was lifted for a kick that would have broken Fergus's back if it had landed, let alone the dog's. But Fergus heard him coming and turned like the wind, his hand going under his coat to where Big Michael and everyone else in the Bar knew that he carried the long knife he used for gutting salmon.

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"Were you wanting something?" Fergus said softly. Very slowly Ryan dropped his hands to his sides and turned on his heel.

I think if anyone had laughed again he'd have killed them, and I wouldn't have been Maeve Ryan that long night for all the gold in Ireland. I know she didn't show herself for three days after.

That was the beginning of it. A few nights later Fergus found poisoned meat laid at the back of his house for the dog, and at the same time the Gardai started watching him as if they thought he had committed a murder.

Twice in one week two policemen lumbered up the side of the hill to his cottage with a warrant, and searched it high and low, for a pheasant feather, or even a bit of wire that could be twisted into a snare. They stopped him if they saw him on the road, and for a month on end they made it impossible for him to fill an order for salmon that he'd had from the big tourist hotel across the mountain. He could have taken the fish easily enough, but it would have been more than even he could do to get them to the hotel.

I think it was that that made him go after Maeve. He might never have bothered with her again but for that.

Nobody ever knew the first night that it happened, or even the seventh. But you can't hide things like that for ever in a village. Someone saw the dog near the back window of Ryan's Bar. Someone noticed the look in Maeve's eyes as she served in the bar some morning, with her husband sleeping like a black log above her head, worn out from hunting Fergus all through an empty night. A heavy, dreaming look, with fulfilment in it, and a dark, hungering greed for more. Not a woman I'd set my cap at, deep breast and white skin and narrow waist and all. I've always thought there was a kind of death in that whiteness of hers. Like the dead moon.

The whispers ran in the village like lean rats, and people began to watch. And to tell. Not outright, of course. It would have been a bold man who would have told Big Michael that Fergus had set horns on him. But whispering to him, "Did you not see Fergus at all these past nights? Strange, very strange. And herself now, is she well? I thought she was looking a little peaky these past mornings." Whispers like that, and softer than that, but enough to turn Big Michael's heart cold in him, not because he loved his wife, but because he owned her, as he owned the Bar and the bottles in it and the brass bed upstairs.

The night that he heard the first of these whisperings he went out as usual with his gun and two under-keepers, up the road to the turn, and beyond it to the fork where one path leads round the

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lake, and the other twists across the mountains to the first of the Glenlure valleys. He followed the second path for maybe a mile, sending the under-keepers on ahead of him with orders where to watch. But as soon as they'd gone he doubled back and lay in wait all night under his own bedroom window, his twelve-bore cocked in his heavy, still hands, and a load of buckshot in the breech that would have torn Fergus in two halves if he had come. But Fergus had played that game all his life and the next morning the chef at the big hotel was weighing two salmon in his kitchen scales and paying Fergus the price of them.

There are men who swear that Big Michael began to go grey that night. Certainly he started drinking more, although it was hard to notice any effect on him except in the whites of his eyes. By the evening they'd have a reddish haze in them and you could see his mind torn as to what he should do that night; stay home and guard Maeve, or go out and guard his salmon. He couldn't do both.

And still Fergus walked gently in the small street of the village, his dog scudding at his heels, and came and leaned over my counter as if the sun was shining all day long and he had nothing to do but lie in it.

And Maeve stood behind the dark red silk of the bar, polishing it with her white hands, the crushed red of her mouth parted a little to show the sharp glisten of her teeth. Ryan had stopped beating her because, I think, he was afraid that if he lifted his hand to her again he wouldn't lower it until he'd killed her.

I think, too, that he had become almost afraid of her. He no longer looked at her as if he owned her, but as if he hated her and hungered for her at the same time, and she stayed, smooth and white and smiling, still as a warm statue behind her blood-red bar.

So it went through a long spring and well into summer, and sometimes I thought that Ryan's mind would break under the strain. If he had been another man I could have felt sorry for him. There were grey shadows in his face by May and white in his black hair. Sometimes when he lifted the first glass of the morning, his hand shook so much that it spilt. And but for my worrying over how it would end for Fergus I could have been heart-glad to see it.

Morals? With Fergus you didn't think of morals. Words like adultery and stealing slid past him like oil on water. Even the priest had given him up long ago, and said nothing as long as Fergus left in a string of trout at the Presbytery now and then.

But there had to be an end. And oddly enough, although almost all that had happened before had been by night, the end came by daylight. No man saw all of it, but some of the men who

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were in it told me what they saw, and I can reconstruct the rest, knowing the ground and the men.

It started around midday dinner-time. There's more than a touch of Spanish about our part of the country and sometimes even the weather seems to have come from Spain to warm us. When it does, we like a small piece of a siesta, sleeping behind closed curtains, the weekly paper drawn over our faces, and the street outside empty as the desert. And this day was hotter than any June day I ever remember, the sunlight falling like molten gold on the dusty road outside my shop. Even the flies seemed stunned with the heat.

It was so hot I couldn't even sleep, and that was how I saw Ryan going past, his gun under his arm. A yard past my cottage he turned up the hillside, as if he wanted to avoid being seen. I went through into the kitchen and watched him going up the steep path, walking fast in spite of the heat. About halfway up he stopped for a minute, and the remaining under-keeper joined him from behind some rocks.

From then, although I could follow them with my eyes to the crest of the ridge, I'll tell the story as I heard it afterwards from other people.

Apparently someone had told Big Michael where he would find Fergus about his business, and when: at the Long Lake in the middle of the Glenlure land, and in the heat of the afternoon, setting his nets across the stream that drops down into the lake from the higher pools. And now Ryan, sure at last, was going to find him there.

His plan was simple. The Long Lake is a narrow splinter of deep water lying along a cliff face, with smaller hills surrounding it on the other three sides and a triangle of flat land at the point where Fergus would be.

From that triangle there were only three ways a man could take if he was running, roughly one from each angle. Two of them were easy—along the lakeside itself or up the river into the hills and after that into the mountains—but both were overlooked by the hills, so that a man who knew the ground and picked his place could cover the two paths at once with a gun. And that was where the under-keeper was heading when I saw him trudging up the hillside with Ryan, although of course I didn't know it at the time.

For something under five miles the keeper and the bailiff went together, and then they came to the butt of the lake. You could imagine it, cool and silver and quiet in the golden sunlight, a white rim of pebbles, a shimmer of sand under the shallow rim of

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the water, and then darkness spreading as the water deepened. The lake is always cold, but out there it must be only ice and darkness. I wouldn't swim in the Long Lake for certainty of heaven. They say that no one ever has, or at least, no one who lived to tell what it was like.

They parted company at the shore. Ahead of them the water curved in a long, narrow kidney shape for about a mile, the last quarter of it hidden by the overhang of the cliff on their left. To the right lay the path the keeper was to follow, which would bring him to a point above where Fergus would be; and commanding not only it, but two of the paths he might take. A challenge, and Fergus would be away, along the only path that was left to him if he wanted to move fast enough to avoid a blast of buckshot.

That third path was a narrow ledge along the almost sheer face of the mountain above the lake, two hundred feet of loose scree and heather and glass-smooth rock beneath it, and three hundred feet of the same kind of thing above. Even the sheep avoided it.

At the end of that path, or somewhere along it, Big Michael would be waiting, his back against a slope of rock, and his gun beside him, although he wouldn't need to use it. One kick with a boot as a man came round the corner, or a lump of rock tossed gently into his gut, would send him clear off the ledge and skidding down the cliff face until what was left of him reached the water. And under the water, for three days, nine days, a month even, until the strange, cold currents twisting far down at the mountain's root released the torn ruin of a body and floated it to shore.

And that, roughly, is what happened.

The under-keeper reached the place Ryan had ordered him to find, and at last, after nearly an hour of slow, careful going, he parted two strands of heather and found himself looking down on Fergus, nearly a hundred feet away from him as shot flies, although down the broken slope and over the flat ground between them it might have been twice as far.

Fergus must have been there a good half-hour already. He had his pegs driven into the banks and his nets spread and was whittling a vast peg with his knife. His dog lay close to him in a patch of shade, and his cap was thrown onto the pebbles. He had even lifted a couple of trout for his supper and they were lying beside the dog on a pad of dock leaves, a thin withy twisted through their jaws to carry them by.

"Fergus Raftery!" shouted the keeper, "stay where you are!"

As soon as Fergus looked up, startled, the keeper loosed a shot to head Fergus along the mountain path and towards Big Michael. And that's the way Fergus went, his knife still in his hand, and the

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dog with him, everything else left lying on the bank as evidence against him.

The keeper followed at his leisure. Sometimes he could see Fergus ahead of him, the dark, copper-auburn head carrying its aureole of sunlight, the black flicker of the dog skidding across the white face of a rock. Sometimes they were hidden by a shoulder of the mountain.

Gradually the keeper fell behind; he was a good quarter of a mile behind Fergus when it happened.

So suddenly that he almost lost his own footing with the shock, the keeper heard a man scream, and a great crash far down the mountainside and another scream and then a noise as if two boulders had hit the surface of the lake. Then nothing—nothing at all but the bees singing in the heather and his own heart beating.

He thought Fergus had slipped, the way he tells it, and he went gently, afraid for his own footing. Sure enough, he found a place where the path had broken, and what seemed like the slightest of scars on the loose face of the mountainside below it. Nothing else.

Of course, according to his story he expected to find nothing else if Fergus had gone. Yet I know that he expected to find Big Michael there, with the horns broken from his head at last and his vengeance taken.

But Big Michael had gone, and it was ten days before they found him, lolling like flotsam in the shallow, crystal water at the butt end of the lake, where he had last parted from his under-keeper. They identified him by his bulk, and a ring he wore. The rocks and the cannibal trout had removed all other means of identification. Fergus's body they never found, and the priest said that it was the weight of sin that chained it to the bottom.

And Maeve? The Bar became hers of course, and when Glenlure brought a new bailiff over from England—a little white-faced man with a thin voice and a degree in forestry—she married him. And she still stands behind her blood-red, dark-shining bar, her smooth white arms reflected in it, and her eyes sullen and slumbering, watching each man that comes in as if she was waiting for someone, and looking away again with a bored, insolent arrogance when she sees who it is. And her little bailiff runs upstairs and downstairs like a white mouse in a cage. Maybe he's happy enough.

That's all of the story that the village knows. If I know more it's because I loved Fergus and couldn't sleep that night, after the tale the under-keeper had brought back and blabbered in the

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Gardai station and the length of the village street; of how Fergus and Big Michael must have met on the mountain path and killed each other, and both their bodies were in the Long Lake. He was still telling it that night to anyone who'd stand him a pint of porter, and every man except me in the village was listening to him in Nolan's Bar.

Ryan's was shut of course, and the women were up with Maeve, pretending to console her. But I walked round the lake towards Fergus's cottage, and it was there that I met him, a shadow slipping away from the door, a bundle over his shoulder and a smaller, darker shadow behind him.

"Is that you, Peadar?" he whispered, and my heart stopped.

"God and all his holy saints protect me," I said, and crossed myself, wishing to God that I'd been to Mass more recently than I had.

He laughed, his teeth white in the half darkness, and his hand flesh and blood on my arm. "It's me all right," he said. "Did you think I was dead?"

"We were all sure of it."

"Thank God for that. Let them stay sure unless you want to see me swing. I swear to you by the moon over our heads, Peadar, that I didn't mean to kill him." And there in the shadow of the mountain, in swift, broken sentences he told me what had really happened.

It was the dog that had saved him. That and some poacher's seventh sense that things weren't quite as they should have been.

Big Michael was standing as I've described him, back against a smooth rock, gun beside him, and a lump of granite in his hand the size of a child's head.

He must have heard Fergus coming and he had it poised the way an athlete would put a shot, balanced on his hand at the level of his shoulder. And the path wasn't wide enough for Fergus to dodge; if he'd tried he'd have gone over just as surely as if the rock had hit him.

The dog was running ahead, low to the ground as always, and much lower than the level of Big Michael's vision, and whether it was sheer hatred, or sheer instinct, the dog leapt for his hand, without a sound of warning.

The dog's teeth opened Ryan's arm from wrist to elbow and the rock fell in the same instant that Fergus came round the shoulder of cliff. That rock must have been the first splash that the keeper heard.

Then, in the long stretch of seconds as the rock was crashing down the scree towards the lake, the two men looked at each other.

Whether it was Maeve they were fighting for, or only hatred—

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the hatred of the governing man for the free man, bailiff for poacher—it was only the two of them now, and even in that moment, Fergus told me, Big Michael was arrogant.

Too arrogant to fight the only way he could have won in such a place. He wanted to use his boots, kick Fergus in the face before he killed him, kick him from there to eternity with the mouth that had kissed Maeve a bloody pulp and the white teeth broken.

So he came rushing, boots scrabbling on the loose path, arms swinging.

Fergus waited for him, waited until the last second.

The dog, which had been flung five yards up the cliff face, was now sliding down again, whining to be in the fight. A pebble from under it skidded past Ryan's face, and for that fraction of a moment he was distracted.

Only a fraction, and then he swung his boot, but as the boot came Fergus dropped to one knee and caught the heel of it and lifted, up and over . . . over . . .

"Before God," said Fergus, "I didn't mean to kill him. I meant to throw him on his back and give him maybe a small bit of a beating for the fright he'd given me. Nothing more than that, Peadar.

"But that ledge wasn't broad enough for a man like him to fall on, and he went over the edge, and screamed, and hit the cliff face and screamed again, and it all happened so quickly, from start to finish, that it was only after his first scream that the rock he'd meant to throw at me reached the water. As swift as that. But even if you believe me, the Gardai won't . . ." and he put up his two hands and touched his throat, delicately.

The water of our own lake lapped softly at our feet, kindlier than the water where Big Michael had died, but cold as the grave itself in the torn fragments of moonlight scattered by the clouds. Somewhere a bird cried desolately and the wind shivered in the reeds.

"And Maeve?" I said, looking at his traveller's bundle.

He spat into the water and cursed her as I've never heard a man curse a woman before or since, and I've done some cursing of women in my time.

"Maeve?" he said at last. "Who do you think told Big Michael where I'd be this afternoon? Who else did I tell? The white face of her, and the white arms of her, and the black heart. She knew what would happen. Or she thought she knew." And he made the sign with his thumb and forefinger that men used to make against devils and witches and women like Maeve, and spat again.

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" So I'll be going, Peadar," he said. " God knows where, but far enough. Say a prayer for me at my funeral if they have one, but don't waste your money on a wreath."

And he came to his feet and waved to me, and was gone, the dog at his heels like a smaller shadow, the two of them quiet as two birds on the wing.

* * *

PUZZLE CORNER

There is no corner in general knowledge, so puzzle your way out of this one if you can. Having achieved the necessary 16 correct solutions without any hole-and-corner business with reference books, turn to page 143 and see how right you were !

1. *Who said:* *a. Publish and be damned*
   b. I'll publish, right or wrong
2. *Of what name is " Teddy " in Teddy bear a diminutive?*
3. *a. What is the diameter of a sixpence?*
   b. How many pennies laid in line measure one foot?
4. *How did the Rosetta Stone help archaeologists?*
5. *What were the supposed originals of these places:*
   a. Cranford
   b. Barchester
   c. Casterbridge
   d. Troy Town
6. *What is the derivation of: a. The Billy Ruffian b. The Bag o' Nails c. The Goat and Compasses d. All My Eye and Betty Martin*
7. *How long is: a. a chiliad b. a light-year*

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an eerie new ghost story
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ARTHUR GORDON
author of " Reprisal "
tells of an intriguing crime in
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RIDING HIGH

**I knew perfectly well
we were heading for the cliff's edge**

by EDWARD HYAMS

PEOPLE often ask me why I live in the country and there are a dozen answers, one or two of which I give them. One reason, which I don't give as a rule, is that years ago I had thrust on me a rather curious responsibility. For a long time it was a burden to me, but I have become used to it and resigned to the fact that it will last for the rest of my life: after that it will fall upon someone else, I suppose.

When I first stayed for a long time in the country, years ago as the result of an illness, I discovered what I can only describe as a passion for riding. I was poor and could only afford to ride hacks, but I spent every moment I could on horseback and faced the prospect of going back to a horseless life with distaste.

When my stay in the country was coming to an end I was offered a job as a clerk to a large firm of farmers. The pay was not good but with it went a house, the three-roomed gate lodge of the old estate which belonged to the farm.

The lodge had no sanitation or water or light, but it had an old loose-box stable for two horses, and it stood in a paddock planted with apple trees. I gave myself a number of reasons for accepting this offer, but the real one was this: I could continue my riding.

I had to hire my horses in the cheapest market and this involved going to the livery stable of a man called Higgins. It was a dirty, shady sort of place; the horses were not very good, and they were always changing, because Higgins was really a horse-coper who hired out the hacks in his stable while waiting for someone to buy them.

I don't know how Higgins came to be a horse-coper. He didn't even like horses and would have preferred to be in the motor-car business, but no one trusted him enough to give him a job and he had no capital. I expect he had inherited the stable. It was a slummy sort of place. It had once been outside the town, but the town had grown round it and then, as it were,

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festered. It was dark and never clean and you reached it by muddy little alleys where sly, pale children played.

Higgins was a kind of cockney Irishman; or at least he could put on an Irish brogue when he wanted to be pleasant or if he thought it would help a deal. When you went to the stables there always seemed to be diffident-looking men hanging about and getting Higgins into corners for private conversation, and if Higgins pulled his wallet out he usually pulled out and dropped a couple of county-court summonses. He was always talking about the way people swindled and cheated him. I should have expected him to fail and vanish long ago, but there are men who, if they can't succeed, can't quite fail either. The real horror of that shifty, shady, Micawberesque kind of life is not that it must come to ultimate disaster, but that it may go on for a lifetime.

I don't want to give the impression that Higgins was that more or less sympathetic object, a "character." He was just a shifty, sad, shabby little man in constant difficulties. But he was not without imagination because he used to play up to me in a kind of game which I enjoyed.

I used to go up to Higgins's stable and pretend that I was interested in buying a horse. I would have a couple of horses put through their paces, and feel hocks, and talk horse with Higgins. It was a case of going halfway to meet a daydream, but no more. I think that Higgins knew perfectly well that I hadn't the money to buy a horse, or to keep one, but he seemed to understand my pleasure and help me to enjoy it. This rather silly business had one advantage: it did teach me to recognize the points of a horse.

One day when I went to the stables to play this game Higgins, looking worried, came bustling out of the filthy little room he called his office, saying, "You're just the man I wanted to see."

"Oh," I said. "Why?"

"Got a horse that would just suit you."

I told him I was broke and that any horse which would just suit *my* pocket would have to be the cheapest horse he ever sold.

Much to my surprise, Higgins said, "So it is."

I asked him *how* cheap and Higgins looked at me slyly and then quickly away again and said, "Five pounds."

"What's the matter with it?" I said. "Only three legs?"

Higgins looked offended at this and said there was nothing wrong with the five-pound horse, and there was no call for me to say a thing like that. He said, "It's in bad condition, I grant you. If it wasn't that I want you to have a horse off me at a price you can afford, I'd keep it a month and feed it up and charge fifty guineas for it." Then he put on his wheedling accent—I can't imitate it—and went on, "Condition or no condition, sir, you're a man

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that knows a horse when he sees one. As nice a grey as ever I had in the place if fed and rested, and not a day more than five years old. At twenty-five bob a leg I'm giving him away."

"I believe you," I said, "but *why*, Higgins, why?"

Well, he looked away over my shoulder, and he said, very sulkily, as if he'd been insulted, or was soon going to be, "'Cause it's got fevvers."

"Got *what*?" I said.

"Fevvers."

I still did not understand, but the quickest way to find out was to see the horse, so I said, "Has it indeed? Well, trot him out, Higgins."

Higgins was down on his luck at the time; he had not even a boy in the stables and had to fetch the horse himself. When he came back he still had that defiant look on his face as if he were saying, *You laugh at me and I'll dot you one.* He was leading the horse. And, just as he'd said, it had feathers.

Of course, when Higgins told me I knew a horse when I saw one, that was all his blarney; but in fact I did know a little about it by now. What I saw, then, was one of the finest animals I'd ever set eyes on in a shocking state of neglect. It would be silvery-white when groomed. It was very dejected, the head and tail drooping and the eyes without lustre or pride. Yet it had every good point of a thoroughbred 'chaser in perfection.

I'm not very sentimental but I have to confess that the moment I saw that horse a lump came into my throat and tears into my eyes. There are very few things more moving than fallen greatness and beauty degraded.

I recognized the horse, by the way, from one unique feature, a pair of enormous wings, springing from the powerful shoulders and folded back along the body. The plumage was dirty, bedraggled, and moulting, but even so there could be no doubt about the animal's identity. I swallowed my tears and said to Higgins, "Where did you get him?"

He looked at me more earnestly than he had ever done before. He was begging to have his past, his reputation as a cheat and liar, overlooked for just this once, and he said, "So help me God, I come 'ere a couple of days back, and *found* 'im. Someone'd left 'im 'ere. It was done spiteful, if you ask me. Well, findings is keepings, but I don't want a horse wiv fevvers, and that's a fact."

I saw his point. No man has to be more careful of appearances than a shady little cheat. Everything about him is questionable, and he must always have plausible answers ready.

But I did not think the horse was left in his stable spitefully,

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to embarrass him. It was done in desperation. Any being likely to be associated with this horse would find himself in a very unsympathetic world in our day and conditions. I thought I understood what had happened.

I said to Higgins, " What's the horse's name? "

" 'Ow should I know? " he said.

" Well, I do His name's Pegasus. How old did you say he was? "

At that, Higgins went through the pantomime of looking into the horse's mouth—and how I hated to see that grubby little creature mortifying the pride of a demigod! Higgins said, "'Not a day more than five years."

I approached the horse and said softly, " Hullo there, Pegasus."

He raised his head a little at that; he looked at me very sadly, rubbed his soft nose in my hand, and whinnied very quietly.

To Higgins I said, " You're wrong. He's at least three thousand years of age."

Higgins became angry at that: he said there was no call to be uncivil about the horse; the horse might be four years old and he might be six and five was an honest estimate, take it or leave it, and what did I expect for five pounds, a National winner?

" Oh," I said, " I'm not quarrelling with his age or his breeding. I'll give you fifty bob for him."

He accepted eagerly. I gave him the money and borrowed a blanket to hide the wings, and walked the horse home and put him in the old loose-box. Then I went up to the farm and borrowed some meal and made a hot mash and fed him. The weather was fine that May and the grass in the paddock very sweet and green. I strapped a blanket over him to keep his wings hidden, and turned him out there.

The next day I borrowed a curry comb and brushes and clippers and fetched Pegasus into the loose-box and gave him a thorough grooming. When I had done that, and after the good feeding had plumped him up a bit and restored the sheen to his coat, I was quite sure that Pegasus was the most beautiful horse I had ever seen or dreamt of.

As soon as he was in condition he got his pride back. He trotted about the paddock and rolled in the long, cool grass with his legs in the air like any silly colt; or he would gallop wildly round and round the paddock, tossing the fine head on the slender neck, with the long but neatly trimmed mane flying and the lovely, silky tail streaming out behind him like a wake.

Once or twice he half spread and flirted his great wings, when I took the blanket off at night, and that made my heart come into my mouth

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But I soon realized, with intense gratification, that Pegasus had no wish to leave me. Sometimes he seemed grateful and friendly; at other times he looked down at me, as I groomed him or prepared his food, with what I can only describe as good-natured condescension, as a gentleman may look at a valued servant.

Sometimes he would let me fondle him, and would even take sugar from my hand and would trot up to me, whinnying pleasantly, when I called him by name or whistled. At other times he would not hear my whistle, and if I went to him he would roll back his lip, toss his beautiful head, and gallop off contemptuously, and stand well away, eyeing me sideways, stamping and neighing. In such moods I was afraid of him

Naturally, I was mad to try riding him, but it was over a month before I dared. It's absurd, but I felt it would be disrespectful. Yet I thought about it. I did not see how to get a saddle on him, because of the wings, and I made a strap to go round him and from which I could hang the stirrup leathers.

I did not dare ride a flying horse by daylight—it would cause talk. So I waited for a clear moonlight night without wind. I went out to the paddock and whistled. I had no idea whether Pegasus would let me mount him. He trotted up, whinnying, however, with the moonlight gleaming in his proud eyes. He made no trouble about accepting the snaffle and bridle, and he stood very patiently to have the stirrups fixed, only looking round inquiringly as if to say, "What are you about, friend?"

I fixed the stirrup leathers very short and while I swung myself up, Pegasus stood as quietly as any of Higgins's hacks. But the instant I was settled, or nearly so, he was off with such a bound that he nearly threw me. I kept my head, got a very firm grip with my knees, riding well forward with a short rein.

In a moment Pegasus had cleared the paddock fence and we were out on the Downs, going like the wind. I soon found that Pegasus was well schooled and had a soft mouth, but he was feeling his oats and, as I was wild with excitement myself, I did not try to check him. We went hell for leather up Juniper Down, shot between the two great monoliths we call the Devil's Gate, and so out onto the stretch of nibbled turf called Arthur's Ride. I knew perfectly well that we were headed straight for the cliff edge, with a three-hundred-foot drop to the South Ness rocks and Killstance lighthouse, but I was not in the least afraid. I knew I could not stop my horse and I am rather timid by nature, but I repeat: I was not frightened.

I knew, of course, how to make a horse go through all the normal paces, but not how to make him fly. I just rode him

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straight at the cliff edge. God knows where I got the insane courage to risk anything so desperate, but it worked.

He gathered himself, as for a leap, I heard a tremendous and heart-stirring rustling all about me, felt unfamiliar muscles tighten under me, was aware of the vast pinions spread about me, and their majestic motion as my mount beat steadily at the rising off-shore air-current.

Instead of falling, we rose. It is useless to try describing what I felt. We went up in great surges and the wind was cool and firm against my face. My heart was bursting with a feeling of wild joy. I thought that I would break out weeping and shouting.

I could see the lights of the English coast behind us, and of the French coast in front of us. Right below was the Killstance light, slowly turning, and there was a good deal of shipping in the Channel. I had no means of knowing whether Pegasus would allow himself to be guided. I tried him gently with the bridle and my heels, but he just threw his head wildly and after that I left him alone.

I hardly know what happened that night. The horse kept quite close to our coast; apparently he had become attached to his home, as horses do. Once he stayed the beating of his wings, and glided down in silence and swiftness towards the lights of a ship, a small, labouring freighter. Pegasus flew close round the ship, and there is no doubt that the look-out and the officer of the watch saw us. I heard a yell, and saw arms thrown up and caught a glimpse by moonlight of the vessel's name . . . it was Greek. Those sailors had a tale to tell when they reached the Piræus equal to any that Odysseus ever told Penelope.

Towards dawn I felt myself growing very tired. Without any motion of mine, Pegasus turned towards the shore and made for home. The most idiotic ideas were passing through my mind. For example, I was worried lest we be seen by the look-out at Lympne airport. I distinctly remember wondering what the fine was for flying without a pilot's licence.

Pegasus was tired, too, for he made a clumsy landing in the paddock, in the grey, melancholy light of an overcast dawn. I nearly came off as he stumbled, and only then became aware that the sudden falling of my spirits, the physical coldness which I felt, the stillness and trembling of my horse were not due to fatigue only, nor to the hour, nor to the lowering sky. I was aware of a presence about us. There was someone in the paddock.

I think I did what was wise. I dismounted, removed all the harness from my horse, and walked as straight and quickly as I could to the house. I left gates open behind me, opened the loose-

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box, prepared a hot mash, and left it. Then I went in and looked at my bed, realized I could not sleep, made myself some coffee, and sat looking out of the window on the side away from the paddock, until the day was well established.

I did not stir until I heard Pegasus enter his stable. Then, in inexplicable anxiety, I went out to see him. He was eating his mash, but he took no notice of me. When I laid my hand on his neck, he edged away.

He was not quite the same horse as he had been. How can I describe it? I don't think it would be too far-fetched to say that there was this difference: he was now, to what he had been, like an intimate friend *after* he has fallen in love, to what that friend was before the event.

I never rode Pegasus again. At night, from time to time, he was missing from the paddock. Several times I saw him, at nightfall, stand suddenly still, then break wildly into a gallop, clear the fence, take off, and be seen for a while, a diminishing black outline of wings and legs and reared head, against the summer sky. Twice I was in the paddock when he was thus summoned: each time my spirits dropped, I became cowed and nervous and physically cold.

But I was never in doubt as to what I had to do. I kept the stable clean, prepared mash, provided hay and oats, groomed Pegasus whenever he would let me. It was both a sorrow and a relief to me when, after one night flight, he did not return. But he may do so; it is impossible to tolerate the idea of putting him, or his rider, whoever that may be, to the shift of leaving him in the slum stable of some Higgins or other. I have a responsibility to the august past, the beautiful and terrible past.

So I continue to live in the country and tell my friends that it is because I like fresh vegetables and that I keep a stable ready for occupation because one day I hope to buy a horse.

★ ★ ★

THE NAUGHTY PREPOSITION

I lately lost a preposition;
It hid, I thought, beneath my chair.
And angrily I cried: "Perdition!
Up from out of in under there!"

Correctness is my vade mecum,
And straggling phrases I abhor;
And yet I wondered: "What should-he come
Up from out of in under for?"

MORRIS BISHOP

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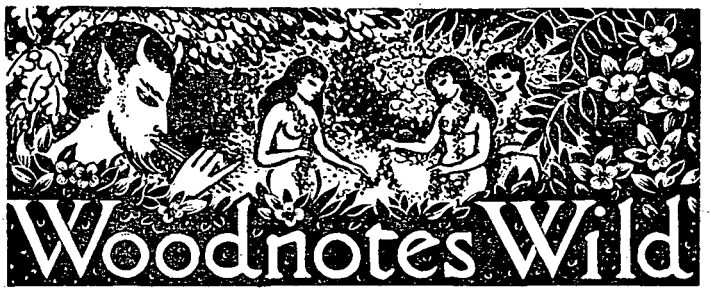

Their last green interchange
What lost dreams shall discover?

ISAAC ROSENBERG

It is the season when young knights go out riding in the woods. When the cavaliers look up at the castle windows to see the pale wrist and the misty form behind the mullion. All manner of birds are singing. It is the month of May, even in the great city; no less among the merchants than in the villas of the *Decameron*. There are young women whom we would paint or draw for Venus. For the fine weather makes all women seem more beautiful. And the Venus, the enchantress, has gone out of town.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL,
Splendours and Miseries

O hurry to the ragged wood, for there
I'll hollo all those lovers out and cry—
O my share of the world, O yellow hair!
No one has ever loved but you and I.

W. B. YEATS, *The Ragged Wood*

Dryad

"Look, let's see ourselves in the distance, then we shall think, how happy they are! We're young; this is spring; this is a wood. In some sort of way or other we love each other, and our lives are before us—God pity us! Do you hear the birds?"

"I don't hear very many."

"No, there are not very many. But you must hear them—play the game my way. What do you smell?"

"Burnt moss, and all the rest of the woods."

"And what burnt the moss?"

"Oh, Eddie . . . your cigarette."

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"Yes, my cigarette I smoked in the woods beside you—you darling girl. No no, you mustn't sigh. Look at us sitting under this old oak. Please strike me a match: I am going to smoke again, but you mustn't, you are still too young to.

"I have ideals, like Dickie. We don't take you into bars, and we love you to give us pious morbid thoughts. These violets ought to be in your hair—oh, Primavera, Primavera, why do they make you wear that beastly reefer coat? Give me your hand—"

"—No."

"Then look at your own hand. You and I are enough to break anyone's heart—how can we not break our own? We are as drowned in this wood as though we were in the sea. So of course we are happy: how can we not be happy?"

ELIZABETH BOWEN,
The Death of the Heart

Forest Call

The wind voice calls and calls you:
Heart of the woods, return!
The little paths remember,
Lonely among the fern . . .

The solemn sunset gladness,
Like some great organ's roll;
The moonlight's white enchantment,
Awakening the soul—

They call you home to Dreamhurst,
Out of the world's great glare;
Your woods and I are waiting,
Heart of my heart, Hilaire!

ELIZABETH ROBERTS MACDONALD,
The Summons

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Lots of Leaves

If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May,
We'd throw with leaves for hours
And draw for days with flowers,
Till day like night were shady
And night were bright like day;
If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May.

A. C. SWINBURNE, *A Match*

Winged Boy

This said, the sweet boy sprung into the myrtle grove, and like a nightingale, from bough to bough, under the green leaves, skipped to the top, and highest story of the myrtles. Then I saw his wings hanging at his shoulders; and at his back, between his wings, a little bow with two darts; and since that moment, never saw him any more . . .

And, what is Love (quoth Chloe then)? Is he a boy, or is he a bird? And, what can he do, I pray you, Gaffer?

LONGUS, *Daphnis and Chloe*
translated by George Thornley

Mocking Bird

Romance, who loves to nod and sing,
With drowsy head and folded wing,
Among the green leaves as they shake
Far down within some shadowy lake,
To me a painted paroquet
Hath been—a most familiar bird—
Taught me my alphabet to say—
To lisp my very earliest word
While in the wild wood I did lie,
A child—with a most knowing eye . . .

EDGAR ALLAN POE, *Romance*

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GREEN PARADISE

Every good Irishman goes back home . . . once

by JOHN STEINBECK

THERE must be a kind of apprehension in the sleepy little villages of Italy, Germany, England, or Ireland in the summer when the descendant of the native comes back to discover the seat of his culture. I suppose Ireland suffers more from this than any other land.

Every Irishman—and that means anyone with one drop of Irish blood—sooner or later makes pilgrimage to the home of his ancestors. There he crows and squeals over the wee cot or the houseen, pats mossy rocks, throws ecstasies over the quaint furniture, and finds it charming that the livestock lives with the family. He wouldn't live there if you gave him the place.

And the locals don't think they're quaint—they think they're perfectly normal. To them it's the American descendant whose speech sounds outlandish, particularly when he puts on a nostalgic brogue, which he invariably does. The natives must think such pilgrims are crazy.

I have just made such a pilgrimage. I am half Irish, the rest of my blood being watered down with German and Massachusetts English. But Irish blood doesn't water down very well—the strain must be very strong.

I guess we thought of Ireland as a green paradise—mother of heroes—where golden people sprang full-flowered from the sod. I don't remember my mother actually telling me these things, but she must have given such an impression of delight.

Kings and heroes only came from this Holy Island, and from the very top of the glittering pyramid was our family—the Hamiltons.

My grandfather, who had come from there carrying the sacred name, was really a great man—a man of sweet speech and sweet courtesy. He died when I was quite young, but it is remarkable how much I remember about him. His biddy, little bog-trotting wife, I am told, put out milk for the leprechauns in the hills behind King City, California, and when a groundling

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neighbour suggested the cats drank it, she gave that neighbour a look that burnt off his nose.

Anyway, we grew up feeling singularly chosen and favoured because of even our demi-Irishness. There was very little running back to Ireland for a look—there was none, in fact. My grandparents never went home to visit the family. I can recall only two relatives who did. One was a cousin of my mother's who was a Judge of the Supreme Court in California. He went back, I guess, mostly to impress the Irish relatives with the importance of the American branch. They must have cut him down to size, because he rarely spoke of his visit. But he spoke of them as well-to-do farmers.

Later, one of my uncles made the trip. He reported that he had wept out of pure sentiment the whole time. He also reported that the family was just about played out; there remained two sisters and a brother of the name—Katherine, Elizabeth, and Thomas—children of my grandfather's brother, all old and all unmarried. They lived in the "new house"—the old house burnt down several hundred years ago.

After that, we had an occasional letter from Elizabeth. She wrote a thin, elegant hand, and her English had an exquisite quality, reminiscent of the eighteenth-century writers of English prose. We felt good about that; we didn't really believe any dull or illiterate Irish existed—not in Ireland, at least. We knew plenty of that kind in this country, but perhaps we thought they had degenerated here.

I should have gone to visit long ago, but I didn't. During the war, I landed at various Irish airports and could have gone, but a reluctance kept me from it—some curious, powerful reluctance always came over me when I got close to the home place. Meanwhile, the letters had stopped and we heard nothing more. Last summer my wife and I finally went there.

It's green, all right—but so is Scotland green. It seemed to me a different green, but I wouldn't submit the two greens to a colour test. We hired a car to cross from Belfast to Londonderry—an extravagance which outraged even the man who owned the car—a Rolls-Royce of sneering gentility, a little younger than Stonehenge and in a little better condition.

Summer was full-blown in Ireland and the grain was bowing golden-headed, ready for the cutting, and then we crossed and came to Derry, and it's a dour, cold city to an outsider—dark, angular buildings and uncrowded streets, waiting for something—a city of protest against the rolling green of Derry and the lovely hills of Donegal across Lough Foyle.

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There was no home feeling here in the bleak hotel that carried its own darkness with it. The girl behind the desk would not smile or pass a cordial word, no matter how much we tried to trap her. In the bar there was no gaiety. I don't know whether laughter was there before we went in for a drink or after we left —none was offered for us to share, and curtains of rules brushed against us.

A drink in our room? Not permitted. Two minutes late to the dining-room? Not permitted to serve after hours. A London paper, then? All taken.

A hush on the people like the hush on the city, and the feeling that eyes brushed over you and dropped when you looked up. We were strangers.

The porter—not the real porter, he hastened to tell us, the real porter was away—said he would get us a man to drive us into the country the next day—a man who knew the countryside. This not-the-real porter was nice to us. He was sorry he couldn't have some clothes pressed for us; it was after hours. He wanted to bring a drink to us. He looked sadly at the bribe in his hand. He would try, and in a while he came back—the liquor was locked up, the manager had the key, and the manager was gone. A sandwich? The pantry was locked up. I don't know who had that key. A copy of the London *Times* in the morning? They were all ordered and it was too late to order another one. He looked as though he wanted to return the bribe; he was a young, dark, sad-looking man. I found myself trying to explain to him.

"Does the young lady at the desk never smile?" I asked.

"Rarely," he said.

"Is no rule ever broken at all?"

"I don't understand," he said.

"Look," I said, "my people came from hereabouts—they were law-abiding people, but there was a filament of illegality in them. My mother wasn't above putting too much catsup on her plate and sopping it up with a piece of bread in a restaurant."

"Catsup?" he asked.

I said, "One of my uncles had a major difficulty in college for stealing chickens. Another of my uncles had to be disarmed when he had murder in his heart, and I myself—" I stopped, because the not-the-real porter was looking at me helplessly, trying to make out my meaning. My voice was rising against a wall of frustration.

"What I am trying to say is this," I said. "Has all illegality gone out of this rebellious island in three generations?"

"Sir?" he asked.

"I mean, if I should give you in your hand more than enough

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—twice more than enough—to buy a bottle of whisky, a loaf of bread, and a sausage, couldn't you find some law-breaker to sell them to you?"

"The rules are very strict," he said, "I'm sorry. I wish I could help you." My heart broke for him. "I'm not the real porter," he said. "Good night, sir, I'm sorry."

We sat in the window, looking across the street at the angry stone buildings and the small locked-up shops. The street was deserted and a desolation came over us. I told my wife how brave and open my ancestors were, how lusty and full of courtesy and fine laughter. I lied about them some—I guess I had to—and the Sunday dark fell on that city which is sombre even on weekdays and in sunlight. Night, not even summer night could soften the lines and sweeten them.

Now my reluctance came on me tenfold and I wanted to give the whole thing up and go away quickly and forget it, because reality was violating every inherited memory, and I was saying to myself that if the old folks went away from here, maybe they had good reason. I put on a bathrobe and set off down the long, deserted, green-carpeted hall to the bathroom. From a room on the corridor came an old woman carrying a broom and a long-handled dustpan. I said good evening to her and her face wrinkled up into a smile that lit the dark corners of that desolate corridor.

"Good evening, sir," she said.

I stopped in front of her, because this was a tone I had not heard. "I know before I ask that the irons are locked up," I said, "but can you steal an iron and take the creases out of a pair of trousers for me?"

"What room?" she asked, and then, "You'll have them."

The iron front was broken. In an hour she had the trousers back, still steaming a little, and I tipped her until she begged for mercy. We slept better because of her.

In the morning, we had our driver all right—he who knew the countryside—a rakish man in a torn cap, who assured us that he knew every nubbing of a hill in all directions. He didn't, but he was willing. His car was so old that it churned and clattered, and a blue, suffocating smoke came from it.

We were looking for a place called Mulkeraugh. You can spell it in half a dozen different ways and it isn't on any map. I knew from half memory that it was near to Ballykelly, which is near to Limavady, and I knew that from Mulkeraugh you could look across the lough to the hills of Donegal.

We clattered along eighteen miles from Londonderry, past

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thatched cottages, and little hedged fields where the black bundles of flax lay waiting to be taken in. The countryside was rolling and lovely, and the blackness of the city went out of us. The Donegal hills were remote and sunny across the broad water of the lough.

We drove right through Ballykelly without knowing it was there, but at Limavady they turned us back. I guess I had thought of Ballykelly as a town; it isn't—it's what in Texas they call a wide place in the road. Except for two churches, it isn't different from the cottage-lined highway we had been driving on.

An old man stood in front of one of the churches. "Mulkeraugh?" he said. "Second turning to the left—a quarter of a mile."

"Do you know any Hamiltons there?" I asked.

"They're all dead," he said. "Miss Elizabeth died two years ago. You'll find Mr. Richey, her cousin, on the hill, though."

Mulkeraugh isn't a place at all. It's a hill and three or four farms near about. Mr. Richey came to the door of the house on the hill and he looked like some of our breed—the pink cheeks, the light blue sparkling eyes. He said, "The Hamilton place is sold—sold to the ground. You can find out about it at the lawyer's office in Limavady."

I said, "I'm the grandson of Samuel—he left here a long time ago."

"I have heard there was a brother," he said, "went away to America. But wasn't his name Joseph?"

It was the same everywhere we asked—my grandfather did not exist. As far as Ireland was concerned, I had no grandfather and there was no Samuel Hamilton. Why should they remember? The tree of our culture had no roots. Maybe I'd known that unconsciously and that was why I had been reluctant to go back.

My grandfather's brother—he who stayed—that was different. And his children—they were different. And how much land they had—that was different. And how improved it was and how much it brought when it was sold. These were immediate things, and who could remember an old, old fact like my grandfather?

Everyone knew the three children of my grandfather's brother—Miss Katherine, Miss Elizabeth, and Mr. Tom. It was a good farm they had—about two hundred acres—and a good house of two storeys. These children never married—the two sisters and the brother. Why? No one knew why. They were well-endowed, well-educated people, and they had more land than most. They had silver spoons and fine china, and little coffee cups so thin you could see through them, and all the collected

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things of the family for hundreds of years—pictures and books and records and furniture—to make them envied all over the countryside. But they never married. They were well known, well liked. They grew old together.

Miss Katherine was the efficient one—almost like Tommy's mother—and Tommy did just what she said about the farm. He ploughed when she said and he sowed when she said and he harvested when she said. Miss Elizabeth was more for reading and writing things, and she had a rose garden. She spent a great deal of her time cultivating her flowers. Tommy was a silent man, but good—and very well liked everywhere, and the three grew older on the farm and they never married.

Then, about twelve years ago, Miss Katherine died. That was the directing head. The farm went to pieces little by little, so slowly that it was hardly noticeable. Tommy, with no one to tell him what to do, when to plough and when to sow, began to neglect the land, and he sold some of the cows and didn't replace them. When the roof leaked, he didn't mend it. The hedges began to creep into the fields. When his friends remonstrated, he smiled and agreed that he should keep up the land, but the directing head was gone and there was no one to tell him.

Elizabeth, the neighbours said, had her head in a book. She tended the roses, and she and Tommy grew ever closer together, and then, about seven years ago, Tommy died. He got a scratch on his side from a nail and did nothing about it, because nobody told him to, and he died of blood-poisoning.

People who told us about it did so reluctantly. Miss Elizabeth, they said, grew " strange " after Tommy died. She'd be smart and clever as always, but there'd be things like this: she would be talking to a neighbour and at the same time listening to something far away. And right in the middle of a perfectly normal conversation, she would say, " Tom is going to take out that tree stump in the lane. We need a new tree there."

And when neighbour women were having tea with her from those thin little cups you could almost see through, Elizabeth would say, " I'll have to ask you to excuse me now—Tom's coming in and he'll be very tired." And she would usher them out of the house. And then in the night they'd hear Miss Elizabeth walking in the lanes between the hedgerows and she'd be calling her brother, telling him it was late and his supper was waiting. And several times she was seen in the night, searching through the fields. She was in a nightgown and her feet were bare, and she wasn't sleep-walking, they said—she wasn't asleep at all. She'd just turned strange, they said.

It wasn't as though she was crazy. Except for that, she talked

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as good sense as anybody, but she just could not bring herself to believe that her brother was dead. And she did another strange thing that was unlike her, they said. She got herself a cause. She joined the party which resists with all its strength the joining of the northern counties to Eire. She worked for her cause, and she made a will in which she ordered that everything she possessed should be sold on her death and every penny turned over to the party, and then she died.

The neighbours said it was a sorrow to see the house torn apart. It was well known that the Hamiltons had beautiful things. On the day of the auction, the cars and the carriages came by the hundred, and people bought pictures just for the frames, and the beautiful silver went, and the fine china, and the books, bought for the binding only—and all by strangers. Strangers bought the farmhouse. It was a sorrow, the neighbours said.

I went to see the house and there was nothing of us there. The rose garden was overgrown with weeds and only the whips of the rose bushes showed above the grass, with hips still on from last year. The ivy had nearly covered the stone paths. The new owners were kind. They were strangers, and what was even worse—we were strangers.

The sexton of the church at Ballykelly is an old, old man—lean and dry—and his speech is like my grandfather's speech.

I asked, "Did you know the Hamiltons?"

"Hamiltons?" he said. "I ought to—I dug their graves. I buried them, all of them. Miss Elizabeth was the last, two years ago—she was a bright one."

We looked at the graves, with the new cement coping around the plot. "Miss Elizabeth put it in her will about the coping," the sexton said. He didn't ask, but we felt he wanted to know.

I said, "My grandfather was William's brother."

He nodded slowly. "I've heard," he said. "Went away—I forget where."

"California," I said.

"What was his name again?" the sexton asked.

The rain was beginning to fall. He left us for a moment and came back, carrying a full-blown red rose. "Would you like to have it?" he asked.

And that's the seat of my culture and the origin of my being and the soil of my background—the one full-blown evidence of a thousand years of a family. I have it pressed in a book.

★ ★ ★

NEIGHBOUR-SAVING

There should be music in every house—except the one next door.

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Sly Glances

AS they marched thro' the town with their banners so gay,
I ran to the window to hear the band play;
I peep'd thro' the blinds very cautiously then,
Lest the neighbours should say I was looking at the men.
Oh! I heard the drums beat and the music so sweet,
But my eyes at the time caught a still greater treat,
The troop was the finest I ever did see,
And the captain with his whiskers took a sly glance at me.

When we met at the ball, I of course thought 'twas right,
To pretend that we never had met before that night,
But he knew me at once I perceiv'd by his glance,
And I hung down my head when he ask'd me to dance.
Oh! he sat by my side at the end of the set,
And the sweet words he spoke I shall never forget;
For my heart was enlisted and could not get free,
As the captain with his whiskers took a sly glance at me.

But he march'd from the town and I saw him no more,
Yet I think of him oft and the whiskers he wore,
I dream all the night and I talk all the day,
Of the love of a captain who went far away.
I remember with superabundant delight
When we met in the street and we danc'd all the night,
And keep in my mind how my heart jump'd with glee,
As the captain with his whiskers took a sly glance at me.

But there's hope—for a friend just ten minutes ago,
Said the captain's return'd from the war, and I know
He'll be searching for me with con-sid-er-able zest,
And when I am found . . . but ah! you know all the rest.
Perhaps he is here . . . let me look round the house . . .
Keep still, ev'ry one of you, still as a mouse,
For if the dear creature is here, he will be,
With his whiskers a-taking sly glances at me.

HAYNES BAYLY

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LION'S MOUTH

Everywhere about them in the darkness was love and death

by STUART CLOETE

THIS was not what Henry Farrar had expected. The books were wrong. Everything was wrong. And she was too pretty. A girl like Denise had no business here. A blonde with dark brown eyes. And a shape. Her hair was honey-coloured; her eyes the colour of dry sherry. His mind went back to her shape. Then his mind gave up, and he drank some beer.

No business here. Certainly not. Not a girl like that. But she couldn't leave her father—"Papa this, Papa that." An old drunk, that's what Papa was. But he'd been a man once. A huge animal shrunk back onto his own bones, with a face like leather and a tongue like a viper.

He went back to the past, to what he had come to call the "interview," when Sir John had sent for him. "Henry," he said, "I'm sending you to the Congo."

He said, "Yes, sir." That was what you said to Sir John—what everybody said.

A character. The Managing Director of Plantations and Development Limited, with offices all over the world. They had plantations, ranches, mines, factories, shipping lines, timber concessions—the works, in fact.

"What did you do last holidays?"

"I was in France, sir."

Of course Sir John knew where he'd been. He'd sent in reports about the factories he'd visited.

"And you speak French?"

"Yes, sir." Of course he spoke French. His mother had been French. The old man knew that, too.

"And the year before you went to the States?"

"Yes, sir."

"To visit your aunt in Palm Beach?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how long did you stay with your aunt?" He answered his own question: "Two days. And then you went to Detroit.

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In winter. Detroit in winter for a holiday. And when you came back you sent in a twenty-page report."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, this time, my lad, you're going to the Congo."

He'd thought, palm oil, rubber, cocoa. "Yes, sir."

"And you're going to collect butterflies."

"What, sir?"

"Butterflies. I want them. More than four hundred kinds, I'm told. That's not including moths. Some very fine moths. And Coleoptera. Coleoptera are beetles. Big ones, like the Goliath. White, delicately striped with black. And scarabs. Dung-beetles, my boy. Very pretty. Some of them are green, iridescent."

"But I don't know anything about—"

"But you will. I have arranged it. You will spend ten days at the Museum of Natural History in South Kensington. You'll learn about how to catch, kill, and set them. You fly to Antwerp on the 15th, and sail for Matadi on the 20th. From there you will proceed up the river on the *General Olsen* and disembark at Macuba, and from there you will go by launch to Seroya where you will occupy the rest-house. Specimens and reports will be sent to me by air each week."

"But, Sir John . . ."

"Don't Sir John me. I know what you are going to say. You are an efficiency expert, and—"

"Yes, sir."

"And wherever you go on a holiday you find something new to investigate. This time there's not a factory within three hundred miles. This time you're going to get out into the open air and catch bugs. And I won't have it," he shouted. "When I give you holidays, you damn well holiday. And if you won't, this is what happens. I've had men like you break down before."

And that was how he had come. Madness. Utter madness.

Sherry, with spots of gold floating in it. He drained his beer. The Belgians made good beer. And certainly there were plenty of butterflies. Big black ones with bright blue markings, and green markings. Butterflies that were all blue and all yellow, and red butterflies. Sometimes there was even a plague of butterflies. He put on his hat. He'd go down to the store, and listen to the radio. There was nowhere else to go. Just the rest-house with the forest at the back of it, and the short walk through the oil palms to the beach, as they called the river landing-stage with its little wooden jetty, and the store. Then he'd see her. She'd be there somewhere. Behind the counter. In the little cubicle they called the office. Or in the house behind the store.

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It was hot outside. Not as hot as he'd thought it would be, but still hot. The natives hardly looked up as he passed through the village that straggled along the beach. They were used to him by now. Women in gay *pagnes*, men in white singlets and khaki shorts. Men in khaki slacks. Some of them wore sunglasses. Darkest Africa. Where was it? It was tame now. Evolved. Nothing was left. Certainly they still beat their tom-toms at night. But they drank beer as he did. They could read and write. They smoked cigarettes. They used typewriters. They sat in chairs and slept in beds. They rode bicycles and drove cars.

But when he said that to Papa, he laughed. "Sacred name of a dog, my little one," he'd said. Then he laughed till he choked.

"My young friend," he went on, "you have been to the circus. And in the circus you have seen the animal-tamer put his head into a lion's mouth. You come away from the circus and say that lion was tame. But, my little one, would you put your head into the tame lion's mouth? Would you? Would you have my little cabbage—" he chucked Denise under the chin—"put her pretty little head into the mouth of that tame lion? But that is what we do each day in Africa. We others who live here."

This time he spat. He had a great contempt for those who only visited Africa. "Fifty years," he said. "Fifty years in Africa, and I still know nothing."

"The natives are evolved now," Farrar had said.

"Yes, monsieur. But Africa is not evolved. Not the mosquitoes, the ticks, the leeches, the guinea worms, the filaria. Not the rivers or the storms. And as to the indigenous peoples—that I leave to those more wise than I, who sit in universities and teach us old ones how to suck eggs."

And all the time she had stared at the old man—at Papa—with adoration, with admiration. Ivory poacher, smuggler, and the lord only knows what else he'd been in the old days. But to her he was a hero. A man. A god. And the trouble was that she was right. You couldn't get away from his masculinity. You wondered at his gnarled hands. How had he lost that finger on his left hand? How had he come by those scars on his chest? He'd seen him stripped once. "Spear wounds," he'd said laughing. But where? and when? and what had happened? And she wouldn't leave him—why, Farrar believed if the old man had not been her father she'd have married him.

That was a fine thing—to be jealous of a girl's father, not as a father but as a man. Of course he'd asked her to marry him. She loved him. She let him kiss her. But she wouldn't leave Papa, because he could not go home. "Why not?"

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"He is Congolais now," she said. "This is his country." She had waved a hand at the forest and the river. "It is his life."

"And yours?"

"Mine is where he is. I am the third generation here. His father was here before him. He has suffered much. But he is known here. Henri," she said, "he is like the river. Everyone knows Old Duclos—Marcel Duclos—who has explored half the Congo, who has been decorated by the late King himself. And me too," she said, "I was born here. My mother lies there"—she nodded up the river where he had had his first post. "A king he was then."

"In the good old days."

"Yes, Henri," she said. "In the good old days. A king among the white man, and a chief among the black."

"And now?"

"Now, monsieur"—she drew herself up to full five feet—"now, he is a legend. A legend that will live long after he is dead."

This was not an affair of a week or two. It had taken him three months to get this far with her. Once in his arms, in the darkness of the perfumed night, she melted. But it always ended the same way, with Papa this and Papa that, with stories of how wonderful Papa was.

All this was in his mind as he walked down the sandy street. Nothing was real here—not the naked babies, the prick-eared dogs, the orange palm oil in the gin bottles on the women's heads, not the palms drooping their savage plumes against the sky. Africa was the land of unreality. It was a background for the play that never happened.

When he entered the shop, with its familiar smell of kerosene, cheese, soft goods, dried elephant flesh, and fish, Denise beckoned to him from behind the counter. She was in white. Her long fair hair, fastened near the head, fell in a thick horse-tail down her back. "Papa—" she said.

"I'm hardly inside before you say 'Papa.'"

She smiled. It was the most beautiful smile in the world. "He wants you. He is waiting in the house."

"How did he know I would come?"

"He knew," she said.

"Of course he knew. I am trapped like a moth with sugar water."

This time she laughed outright. "Go," she said.

"I'll go now. But tonight . . ."

"Yes," she said.

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" Tonight by the oleander." Henry touched her hand. It was cool. How did she stay so cool to the touch? He went through the back door and across the yard into the house. It had a wide verandah. Inside, it was dark till your eyes got used to the lack of light.

Marcel Duclos was reclining in a chaise-longue of wicker made by natives to his own design. Everything he had was specially made to accommodate his enormous length. " Ah," he said, " I thought you would soon be here. Yes," he said, " to trap a leopard one uses a fat goat. To trap a young man a pretty maid. The principles of nature remain constant."

" A leopard comes to eat, monsieur."

" And a man is without appetite? " His laughter filled the room. It was enormous, like himself. His merry, toothless mouth opened wide, and the sound came out, high at first then deep, rumbling like thunder in his belly. " But you want to marry her? "

" Yes, I want to marry her."

" And she won't because of her papa. Do not be annoyed, my friend. She is faithful. That is rare in a woman. With dogs that is something else. I have had wonderful dogs, courageous and faithful." He stopped. " But I did not send for you to tell you of my dogs. Tomorrow I must leave you. She will be in your charge."

" Leave here, why? "

" Because the administrator has asked me to go and deal with some little matter up the river. He is down with fever and has given me full authority. He cannot spare his assistant. He is too inexperienced and, besides, he needs him. So he has sent for me."

" What sort of trouble? "

" Gorillas, my young friend. They have killed a woman and a man. They met in a banana patch. The woman screamed, the man ran to her and threw his spear. Then the gorilla caught him and the woman." He was smiling. " It is Africa still, you see." He seemed pleased. He dropped his great hand on the double-barrelled rifle on the floor beside him. " You see, my little one, the tame lion has closed his jaws again. And when he does, it is us, the old ones, upon whom they call. Perhaps that is why we remain—to be of use once more. And now go, Henri, and bring over your things."

" I am to stay in the house? "

" But certainly. You see, monsieur, I know you are a man. But I do you the compliment of also believing you to be a gentleman."

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"I am much honoured." And indeed he was. But it was clever all the same. The old devil knew what he was about.

"Send your boy over with your things, and we shall expect you for dinner. For drinks and then dinner. I shall leave at dawn. Already they are preparing the piraguas."

"Not the launch?"

"It is too shallow for the launch, my friend. No, it is like the old days. The pirague and the gun. You must calm her," he said. "It is nothing, but it does not please her. She wants to come, but after all, what is it? An outing in a boat, a couple of shots in the forest, and it is over. Gorillas are very easy to kill. Much easier than a man." In his time, Papa had killed men too, there was no doubt about that. "And don't forget she is in your charge."

"I shall not forget." In his charge. Oh yes, he was to have his cake, but not to eat, just to look at. The old devil.

That night the old man talked of the past. Of how, as a boy with his father, he had found human flesh being smoked in a hut. Of the native wars of tribe against tribe. Of how the Arab slavers had, in the still further past, got as far as Stanley Falls, and some believed they even reached Bumba. He talked of elephants and forest buffaloes—reddish animals as savage as their big black Southern cousins. He talked of white men who had gone native, of the pygmies in the Ituri forests, and of the okapi.

As he talked, the girl watched him with wide eyes and parted lips. This miracle, this human wreck, this archangel, this extraordinary creature was her father. In some curious fashion he was her god and her baby. They drank a Portuguese red wine with their dinner. It was excellent. Denise brought cigars from a drawer in the big sideboard. They had coffee and liqueurs. The evening was special, even festive in a way.

Little had been said about Duclos's departure except that Henri was to stay in the house. "I do not like to leave her without a man," her father said. "Sometimes there are bad men, sometimes serpents or leopards. One never knows, and it will put my mind at ease."

Moths banged against the pressure lamp that hissed on its high stand. A beetle struck the glass and fell on the table. It lay on its back, kicking its legs. "Have you got that one?" Duclos asked. Then he laughed. "Fancy Sir John wanting moths and beetles!"

"You know him?"

Duclos suddenly became careful, as if he had let something out that he had meant to keep to himself. "I have met him." Then he said, "Now go out, my children, and leave me. I shall read

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for an hour. Outside it is moonlight, and you are young and of opposite sexes." This made him laugh loudly. "That is a very pleasant thing to be, in the moonlight with the perfume of the oleander and moonflowers about you, and the little rustlings of the forest. The occasional cry of a bird and, in the distance, the tomtoms beating like your own hearts. And everywhere about you in the perfumed darkness there is love and death. Things and people making love, mating, and things and people killing each other in the indigo world of the forest. Go, my children."

As they went out Denise said, "He is strange tonight. Strange and not drunk. Sometimes he is a little drunk, but I always know. And did you see the book he took down to read?"

"No."

"It was the Bible. Is that not a strange book for him to read?"

Then the night caught them, enveloped them in its warmth and softness, in its silver and black shadows. Her body was warm, too warm, and as perfumed as the night and as soft in his arms.

When they went back the lamp was burning low. No one had pumped it up and the old man was asleep with the Bible on his knees and the rifle on the floor beside him.

For four days there was no news. They did not expect any. They were awaiting the old man's return. Denise, with the help of her African clerk, ran the store. Henry had collected butterflies, each day feeling a bigger fool as he wandered about with his green net, killing-bottle, and collecting-tin, and then, in the evening, just as he had finished his bath, he heard some shouts and ran out.

A man in a small piragua had come down the river. He had a letter in his hand and he was giving it to Denise.

"It's for you," she said. Henry tore it open.

Dear Henry, Please come up here. There has been a small drama. Get a bigger canoe and the bearer will guide you. Bring food for two days, fresh water, and the 10.75. Denise will give it to you. It is regrettable that Denise must stay alone, but there is no real danger. It is merely that as a parent one is always anxious. Please give her my love and compliments.

With distinguished sentiments, I remain your friend,

Marcel Duclos

He handed Denise the letter.

"I do not know what it is, but you must go. I will prepare everything—food, filtered water, the rifle, ammunition, medicines. A small drama," she said. "For him that is a lot."

Before it was light the following morning he left in a big canoe with ten paddlers and the guide. They had been able to get

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nothing out of the guide. The chief, as he called Duclos, needed the young monsieur. That was all. But once in the canoe, he urged the paddlers to hurry.

The wet paddles flashed like spears in the sun, and at about midday they turned off into a creek, not much wider than a room, a dark forest tunnel the floor of which was water the colour of ink. Black water, sluggish, into which the branches of the trees dipped their leaves and flung their roots, grasping at it as if to hold it back.

That night they slept by a fire on the bank in air that was thick with mosquitoes. All next day there was no change in the scenery. The black ribbon continued to unwind in the endless forest. Again they camped and again they were kept awake by clouds of mosquitoes, and then, on the following morning, the guide pointed to the shore.

There, between two big trees whose buttressed roots projected into the water, was a landing-place. Hidden near it, unseen till you got quite close, were other canoes. They made fast with liana lines. The boys picked up the baggage. Henry took the rifle and, following the guide, they now entered the forest itself, walking in single file along a twisting path no wider than a man's two feet placed side by side.

Overhead the trees still obscured the sun. Big leaves brushed their legs as they marched. Sometimes there was a crash in the bush as something burst its way through the undergrowth and tie-tie that draped the trees. Sometimes a monkey screamed at them. Once they saw a snake—a python—swathed about the fork of a spindly sapling that sought the upper air.

This was Africa. This was what old Duclos had meant when he spoke of it. Here anything could happen. Before this Henry had only touched its fringe—the very hem of its petticoat. Lord, he could hear the old man's voice as he thought it. This was the lion's mouth.

Then the forest began to thin out. These were small gardens where bananas and manioc grew. Some scattered huts and, at last, a clearing of trampled black ground. Here there were more huts.

At the doorway of one much larger than the rest a tall native stood, leaning on a spear. In his hair he had a bunch of red parrot feathers, about his waist a tattered leopardskin. Three men, wearing only loin-cloths and necklaces of crocodile teeth, holding spears in their hands, stood watching him approach. This must be the chief, Henry thought. These were real Africans. They were as they had always been.

The chief moved his spear from his right hand to his left and

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raised his empty hand. Henry did the same. The chief called, and another man came out of the huts. He had on shorts. He also wore a khaki shirt and sun-glasses with plastic rims. The chief pointed and he came forward.

" Monsieur has come," he said. He held out his hand. " I am Innocent Magobo." Henry took the proffered hand.

" I am here," he said. " What has happened? "

" Monsieur, the white chief has gone mad."

Mad! Duclos could not go mad. Drunk, yes. Mad, never.

" Monsieur, the young men—the warriors—took him up to the gorillas. A family of them. We knew where they were, and he, the great white king, went towards them. The king of the gorillas—as big as a buffalo, an elephant—came forward to meet him, hammering his chest and screaming. And we waited, expecting to see the white chief put up his gun and fire upon him. But he does not. He continues to advance.

" The king gorilla drops his hands to the ground and throws up earth and sticks, which is their custom, screaming all the while. The son then comes along, almost as big as the king, and the wife with a baby on her back. They all scream. The king gorilla rises up. Oh monsieur, like a mountain! But does the white man stop? Oh no, he proceeds slowly. It was unbelievable to watch.

" At a metre away he stretches out his gun but does not fire. He gives the gun to the gorilla. He takes it and bends the barrels in his hands. He lets it fall between them. Monsieur Duclos draws his hunting-knife and flings himself upon the beast. In a moment he is torn apart.

" His left hand is gone, bitten through, half his face is gone where the gorilla has struck him with his open hand. Then the young men attack with dogs and spears.

" Never in the history of the forest has such a thing been seen! Never such courage! There will be songs made of this. All Africa will ring with them. Already I have written ten verses."

" You were there? "

" Oh no, monsieur. I am a clerk. I am evolved. That is for hunters."

" Is he alive? "

" He is alive, but . . ."

" But what? Where is he? "

" He told me to tell you. To warn you. He is no longer beautiful. And also he begins to go mad. We have put medicines on him—leaves and roots. I have administered aspirin, but you cannot cure with aspirins what a king gorilla has done to a man."

" Take me to him."

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The chief now pushed the interpreter away and took Henry by the arm. He led the way to a hut.

Duclos shouted, "Ah, my young friend!" The great voice seemed unchanged. "You have heard the story. Denise must not know it. Tell her a double misfire. Old cartridges. Anything you like."

"But why?"

"Why, my young friend? Why? Because if the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. She will not leave me. So I must leave her. And you must kill the gorillas—the whole family. Then you will be a great man, a hunter, a chief, a hero. You will avenge me. Her love will be transferred to you.

"You see"—his voice was failing now—"she must have a hero. I know the child. She is like me, faithful to the end. You will be my avenger. It was the only way. I was near my end anyway, but she would never have gone with you. And once away, among other women, would you have remembered her? This way is certain, my young friend. My last plan—my best—and carried out to perfection, like all my plans. To perfection."

He held out his hand, pushing it out from under the dirty blanket. "Do not worry, Henri, do not be afraid. All that noise is nothing. They die more easily than a man. And I could not have lived long," he said. "I would have dragged on for a year, two years, but every day it was getting worse. It was hard to keep her from seeing. The pain, my friend. That was something, and I am one who has had much pain. I have been tortured. By savages, I have . . ."

Henry could hardly hear him now. "The priest," Duclos said. "He will be too late."

What did he mean about the priest? How strong the smell of gangrene was. Henry took the great hand in his. Now he would never know how he had lost that finger. The hand was cold and dry.

"I can go now, Henri. I was waiting for you. It was good of you to come. You are an amiable young man and she is an eagle. The daughter of an eagle. You remember?" He gave a kind of chuckle. "The lion has closed his jaws, Henri." The grasp of the hand he held weakened. It fell to the floor.

Marcel Duclos was dead.

Henry Farrar got little sleep that night. The tomtoms never stopped. The big talking drums beat out their message, pounding at intervals. He could pick up the answers coming back. Faintly he could hear the relays as the messages were sent on.

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All over the vast Congo basin, where this old man had been known, the story was passing from village to village, from drum to drum.

And that damned evolved Innocent. What a name—Innocent Magobo! He had talked for hours about gorillas. How horrible they were, how dangerous, how they stole women for themselves and kept them, how he had heard of a man who had been picked up by one and dashed against a tree so that not a bone of his body was entire. "Pulp, monsieur. Just pulp, enclosed within his skin. So great is their strength."

Then at dawn there was the grave to dig. Innocent had seen to this in consultation with the chief. At last it was done. Wrapped in his blanket, lowered with ropes of tie-tie, Duclos was laid to rest in the deep black soil of the forest, at the foot of a great silk-cotton tree, guarded by buttresses ten feet high. A cross of mahogany was being constructed.

The Africans who had stood watching the ceremony were now preparing the customary funeral feast, except for the hunters who stood in a group waiting for him with their spears, arrows, and bows. Their prick-eared dogs squatted at their feet with big wooden bells attached to their loins.

Every eye seemed focused on him. Even the dogs watched him with sharp dark eyes.

Henry picked up his rifle. The hunters turned towards the forest. They reached a clearing where the manioc was more than shoulder-high and, through a tunnel-like path in the trees, they came to a banana plantation. Here the hunters stopped and, at a signal from their chief, spread out into a line.

The dogs ran forward, their wooden bells rattling softly. They moved on slowly. The hunters paused. Suddenly, from beyond the dogs, came the sound of hammering, as if a gigantic drum was being beaten. The dogs were whimpering, almost screaming. Like all their kind, they could not bark. The hunters moved away on either side, leaving Henry alone.

As far as he remembered, he had never shot anything bigger than a rabbit. He felt there should have been some intermediate form. That the progress, from a rabbit weighing two pounds to a gorilla weighing six hundred, was too swift. As a business-efficiency expert, he felt this. He almost laughed. It was curious how one's brain worked. Of course he could use a rifle but . . .

The hammering increased. There was a terrifying scream. Then he saw the gorilla coming towards him on its knuckles. It was squatting, using its arms as crutches. It was the big male. It was like a great black barrel, a barrel with a man's head. The eyes blazed, the fangs were bared. As soon as he saw Henry, he

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screamed again, lips writhing back, exposing the gums. He threw earth and twigs with his hands, turning them outwards and scooping the earth up with the palms. Then he beat his immense chest again, stood up, and yelled, screaming horribly.

They were now ten yards apart. Henry was sweating with fright. It was unbelievable. This was not an animal. Nor was it a man. It was a devil. A devil out of the forest. He could see the wound where Duclos had driven his knife into the breast. There was dry blood and the skin was split. But he had not hurt him. Nothing could hurt this thing.

The small yellow-and-white dogs were all round the gorilla, fearlessly rushing in and away again, distracting him. Henry raised his rifle. He aimed at the base of the throat. He fired.

The gorilla fell back, his hand grasping at his neck. Henry slipped another cartridge into the breech, and fired again, and reloaded. There was another scream as a second gorilla, almost as large as the dead one, came charging out at a shambling run. Henry fired at once and the beast rolled over. Duclos had been right, they were not hard to kill.

The dogs now closed in and began to savage the bodies, attacking them fiercely. The hunters, who had been invisible, appeared.

It was over. He had killed two gorillas. He was a hero. He sat down on a fallen tree. His legs would no longer support him.

Henry was asleep in the village when Denise and the priest arrived. They found him in his hut.

"I have heard," she said, as he came out rubbing his eyes. "This is Father François. We hoped to be in time but we are not."

"We can pray, my daughter," the priest said. He turned to Henry and said, "I have told her."

"Told her what, Father?"

"That he had not long to live. That he was in great pain, which would have got worse. That this was a fitting end for my friend Marcel Duclos. Yes indeed, though he went alone, the good God will welcome him. A great man, a great Colonial."

"How did you know? How did you come?" Henry asked.

"There were two letters," Denise said. "One for you and one for the Mission. The Father picked me up. We came by motor boat and towed a canoe for the last part. And now rest, my little one," she said. "We are going to the grave."

He watched them go. The priest and the girl. This was Africa. Last night a burial feast of savages, today a prayer of Christians, and tomorrow they would be gone.

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He went back. It was over. It was just about to begin. All life would be measured by this. Before the gorillas, and after them. Before Africa. Before Denise. Before their marriage. Before the circus lion that had closed its jaws on the tamer once again, and after it. He heard the old man's last laugh. He smelt the gangrene. He saw Denise and the white Father, the dark forest, the hanging python in the sapling fork, the gorillas, the chief with his red parrot-feather head-dress. And then he slept.

Only when they got back to the settlement did they talk. Too much had happened. The conversation remained superficial. It had been decided to leave Duclos where he had died. The priest said he would see that a brass plaque was fastened to the tree. The witch-doctor, collaborating, said the tree was a fetish tree and was now more sacred than ever. This made Father François smile. What was the good of being angry? "They are children," he said. "Children, and this will give us a chance to come here often. Perhaps we can begin a school. That would be the finest memorial to so great a man as our friend."

Denise dabbed her eyes.

"Do not be sad, my daughter. It was for the best. It has saved him much agony."

"Yes, Father," she said. "You are right. But the tree under whose shade I grew up is gone. I am alone now."

"No, you're not," Henry said.

The priest said, "Why not come to the Mission? It would give us much pleasure to marry you."

"We will come," Denise said.

When the priest had gone chugging down the river in the pac-apac, when they had kissed, when Denise had cried and been comforted, when they had eaten, only then did she say, "And, Henri, what in reality are you? I mean what do you do? You are not a veritable collector of papillons?"

"Oh no. That was just an idea of Sir John Baker's. I am a business-efficiency expert."

"Ah yes," she said. "It sounds intelligent. But you will never be that to me."

"Not to you?"

"Ah non—to me you are a hero. You have avenged Papa. Already they make songs of it—of my father and my lover." Then she said, "But it's wonderful all the same."

"What is?"

"That Sir John should have sent you."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, when Papa wrote and asked him to send out a husband for me, we had no idea what he would be like. But

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Papa is always right. He said, ' John will make no mistake. He is a good judge of men.' Of course I said, ' But Papa, it is I, not Sir John, who must marry this paragon.' My God, then he was angry. ' It is customary,' he said, ' for parents of our class to choose the husbands of their daughters.' Then I got angry.

" Of course," she said, " you have not yet seen my rage. But you will. I have a temper. I am terrible, terrible. I said, ' Your Sir John is not my Papa.'

" ' No,' Papa said, ' but he is my friend, my oldest friend, in whom I have the most profound confidence. The man he sends will be perfect in every way.' And then, voilà—you come! I fall violently in love with you.

" Naturally," she went on with a smile, " I am ready for love and I do not see many young men. So, as Papa said, it was certain, just a matter of nature taking its course. And I am very natural."

" I'll say," Henry said.

" *Tu dis?* "

" That you are natural."

" Well, I am Congolaise. I have lived with nature all my life. But do you know what I want when we are married? "

" No."

" To see no more nature. I am too old for it now. I want to have a mink coat and go to night clubs with jewels dripping from my neck and arms."

" My sweet, I told you I am an efficiency expert, not a millionaire."

" Yes, yes, but I am rich. What you call an heiress. It was just that Papa did not care for that sort of thing. And he did not want me married for my money. But since you did not know and have taken me for myself, we can enjoy ourselves in the grand manner. Is it not so, my hero? " She folded her hands in front of her and stared up into his face.

" Hero," he said, " that will take some living up to."

" Oh no," she said. " I will see to it. Yes, me and the godfather I have never seen, the good Sir John."

★ ★ ★

INFERNAL EQUINOX

It's spring! Again life focuses
On grasses and on crocuses,
On rows of deep blue irises
And one or two new viruses.

PHILENE HAMMER

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ARMAGEDDON

There are things beyond fear

by FREDRIC BROWN

IT happened—of all places—in Cincinnati. Not that there is anything wrong with Cincinnati, except that it is not the centre of the universe, nor even of the State of Ohio. It's a nice old town and, in its way, second to none. But even its Chamber of Commerce would admit that it lacks cosmic significance. It must have been mere coincidence that Gerber the Great—what a name!—was playing in Cincinnati when things slipped elsewhere.

Of course, if the episode had become known, Cincinnati would be the most famous city of the world, and little Tommy would be hailed as a modern St. George and get more acclaim than a quiz kid. But no member of that audience in the Bijou Theatre remembers a thing about it.

Not even little Tommy Westerman, although he had the water pistol to show for it.

He wasn't thinking about the water pistol in his pocket as he sat looking up at the conjurer on the other side of the footlights. It was a new water pistol, bought en route to the theatre when he'd inveigled his parents into the five-and-dime store on Vine Street, but at the moment, Tommy was much more interested in what went on upon the stage.

His expression registered qualified approval.

The front-and-back palm was no mystery to Tommy. He could do it himself.

True, he had to use miniature cards that came with his magic set and were just right for his nine-year-old hands. And of course, anyone watching could see the card flutter from the front-palm position to the back as he turned his hand. But that was a detail.

He knew, though, that front-and-back palming seven cards at a time required great finger strength as well as dexterity, and that was what Gerber the Great was doing. There wasn't a telltale click in the shift, either, and Tommy nodded approbation. Then he remembered what was coming next.

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He nudged his mother and said, "Mum, ask Dad if he's got an extra handkerchief."

Out of the corner of his eye, Tommy saw his mother turn her head, and in less time than it would take to say, "Presto," Tommy was out of his seat and skeltering down the aisle. It had been, he felt, a beautiful piece of misdirection and his timing had been perfect.

It was at this stage of the performance—which Tommy had seen before, alone—that Gerber the Great asked if some little boy from the audience would step up on the stage. He was asking it now.

Tommy Westerman had jumped the gun. He was well in motion before the magician had asked the question. At the previous performance, he'd been a bad tenth in reaching the steps from aisle to stage.

This time he'd been ready, and he hadn't taken any chances with parental restraint. Perhaps his mother would have let him go and perhaps not; it had seemed wiser to see that she was looking the other way.

You couldn't trust parents on things like that. They had funny ideas sometimes.

"—will please step up on the stage?" And Tommy's foot touched the first of the steps smack on the interrogation point of that sentence. He heard the disappointed scuffle of other feet behind him, and grinned smugly as he went on up across the footlights.

It was the three-pigeon trick, Tommy knew from the previous performance, that required an assistant from the audience. It was almost the only trick he hadn't been able to figure out. There *must*, he knew, have been a concealed compartment somewhere in that box, but where it could be he couldn't even guess. But this time he'd be holding the box himself. If from that range he couldn't spot the gimmick, he'd better go back to stamp-collecting.

He grinned confidently up at the magician. Not that he, Tommy, would give him away.

He was a magician, too, and he understood that there was a freemasonry among magicians and that one never gave away the tricks of another.

He felt a little chilled, though, and the grin faded as he caught the magician's eyes. Gerber the Great, at close range, seemed much older than he had seemed from the other side of the footlights. And somehow different. Much taller, for one thing.

Anyway, here came the box for the pigeon trick. Gerber's

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regular assistant was bringing it in on a tray. Tommy looked away from the magician's eyes and he felt better. He even remembered his reason for being on the stage. The servant limped. Tommy ducked his head to catch a glimpse of the underside of the tray, just in case. Nothing there.

Gerber took the box. The servant limped away, and Tommy's eyes followed him suspiciously. Was the limp genuine or was it a piece of misdirection?

The box folded out flat as the proverbial pancake. All four sides hinged to the bottom, the top hinged to one of the sides. There were little brass catches.

Tommy took a quick step back so he could see behind it while the front was displayed to the audience. Yes, he saw it now. A triangular compartment built against one side of the lid, mirror-covered, angles calculated to achieve invisibility Old stuff. Tommy felt a little disappointed.

The conjurer folded the box, mirror-concealed compartment inside. He turned slightly. " Now, my fine young man . . . "

What happened in Tibet wasn't the only factor; it was merely the final link of a chain.

The Tibetan weather had been unusual that week, highly unusual. It had been warm. More snow succumbed to the gentle warmth than had melted in more years than man could count. The streams ran high, they ran wide and fast.

Along the streams some prayer-wheels whirled faster than they had ever whirled. Others, submerged, stopped altogether. The priests, knee-deep in the cold water, worked frantically, moving the wheels nearer to the shore where again the rushing torrent would turn them.

There was one small wheel, a very old one that had revolved without ceasing for longer than any man knew. So long had it been there that no living lama recalled what had been inscribed upon its prayer plate, nor what had been the purpose of that prayer.

The rushing water had neared its axle when the lama Klarath reached for it to move it to safety. Just too late. His foot slid in the slippery mud and the back of his hand touched the wheel as he fell. Knocked loose from its moorings, it swirled down with the flood, rolling along the bottom of the stream, into deeper and deeper waters.

While it rolled, all was well.

The lama rose, shivering from his momentary immersion, and went after other of the spinning wheels. What, he thought, could one small wheel matter? He didn't know that—now that

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other links had broken—only that tiny thing stood between Earth and Armageddon.

The prayer-wheel of Wangur Ul rolled on and on, until, a mile farther down, it struck a ledge, and stopped. That was the moment.

And now, my fine young man . . .

Tommy Westerman—we're back in Cincinnati now—looked up, wondering why the conjurer had stopped in mid sentence. He saw the face of Gerber the Great contorted as though by a great shock. Without moving, without changing, his face began to change. Without appearing different, it became different.

Quietly then the magician began to chuckle. In the overtones of that soft laughter was all evil. No one who heard it could have doubted who he was. No one did doubt. The audience—every member of it—knew in that awful moment who stood before them, knew it—even the most sceptical among them—beyond shadow of doubt.

No one moved, no one spoke, none drew a shuddering breath. There are things beyond fear. Only uncertainty causes fear, and the Bijou Theatre was filled then with a dreadful certainty.

The laughter grew. In crescendo, it reverberated into the far dusty corners of the gallery. Nothing—not a fly on the ceiling—moved.

Satan spoke.

"I thank you for your kind attention to a poor magician." He bowed, ironically low. "The performance is ended."

He smiled. "All performances are ended."

Somehow the theatre seemed to darken, although the electric lights still burnt. In dead silence, there seemed to be the sound of wings, leathery wings, as though invisible Things were gathering.

On the stage was a dim red radiance. From the head and from either shoulder of the magician's tall figure there sprang a tiny flame. A naked flame.

There were other flames. They flickered along the proscenium of the stage, along the footlights. One sprang from the lid of the folded box little Tommy Westerman still held in his hands.

Tommy dropped the box.

Did I mention that Tommy Westerman was a Boy Scout? It was purely a reflex action. A boy of nine doesn't know much about things like Armageddon, but Tommy Westerman should have known that water would never put out that fire.

But, as I said, it was purely a reflex action. He yanked out his new water pistol and squirted it at the box of the pigeon trick. And the fire *did* vanish, even as a spray from the stream

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of water ricocheted and dampened the trouser leg of Gerber the Great, who had been facing the other way.

There was a sudden, brief hissing sound. The lights were growing bright again, and all the other flames were dying, and the sound of wings faded, blended into another sound—the rustling of the audience.

The conjurer's eyes were closed. His voice sounded strangely strained as he said, "This much power I retain. None of you shall remember this."

Then, slowly, he turned and picked up the fallen box. He held it out to Tommy Westerman. "You must be more careful, boy," he said. "Now, hold it so."

He tapped the top lightly with his wand. The door fell open. Three white pigeons flew out of the box. The rustle of their wings was not leathery.

Tommy Westerman's father came down the stairs and, with a purposeful air, took his razor strop off the hook on the kitchen wall.

Mrs. Westerman looked up from stirring the soup on the stove. "Why, Henry," she asked, "are you really going to punish him with that—just for squirting a little water out of the window of the car on the way home?"

Her husband shook his head grimly. "Not for that, Margaret. But don't you remember we bought him that water pistol on the way to the theatre, and that he wasn't near a water tap after that? Where do you think he filled it?"

He didn't wait for an answer. "When we stopped in at the cathedral to talk to Father Ryan about his confirmation, that's when the little brat filled it. Out of the baptismal font! Holy water he uses in his water pistol!"

He clumped heavily up the stairs, strop in hand.

Rhythmic thwacks and wails of pain floated down the staircase. Tommy—who had saved the world—was having his reward.

★ ★ ★

PRETTY STEEP

I am rushed off without much ceremony to participate in an unrehearsed television show with Anita Loos, Carol Channing, and some of the show's artists; and when I am asked by a *compère* what I think of New York's pretty girls and skyscrapers, I sensationally and unwittingly reply that I love them all and climb every one I get the chance to climb!

ALAN DENT, *My Dear America*

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HOUSE to HOUSE

Let's all move one place on

LEWIS CARROLL

They popt her into the Car, enclosed in a Basket.
She, vibrant with Rage and Fear, imperative protesting,
Hurling herself with hysterick Leaps against the Enclosure,
Cursing the Universe in general, and more particularly the Cook who held her . . .
Was whiz'd through three circles of hell, through Stratford Broadway . . .
And deposited with a Thump on a Kitchen Table;
While the Demon Cook muttering dark venoms, rusht for the Primus,
Because that is the quickest Thing in the Word to boil a Kettle . . .

RUTH PITTER, *Musa Translated*

Anxious Departure

There is, of course, no sense of isolation greater than that of being ready to start off on a long journey only to find the cat gone. With a dog you know its habits; but a cat might be anywhere . . .

When faced with a situation like this there is really only one thing to do—to go back inside the house, open the newspaper and have a good read. For psychological reasons, however, that is usually impossible. A husband must sharpen knives, bang dishes, crinkle a paper or do whatever is calculated to home the cat to base.

It is then the wife's duty to call—for women seem to call cats better than men. They are less self-conscious and their voices squeak more easily—for, in calling a cat, you never say " Tab.

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Tab. Tab," but " Tib. Tib. Tib," and the really skilled alternate the rhythm until it sounds like a dripping tap. Thus: " Tibby. Tib. Tib. Tib. Tibby. Tibby. Tibby."

Of course it's all no use. The cat comes back when it damned well pleases, purring and rubbing itself against the water butt. In our case this was half an hour later (we were lucky) and my wife, who reserves a great fund of sympathy for cats which she sometimes lacks for me, spoke the inevitable but immortal words:

" My poor Tibby, where did you been, darling? Where did you been? "

A Peasant: " Are we ready now? "

" Did you go away because you didn't want to leave your nasty home? "

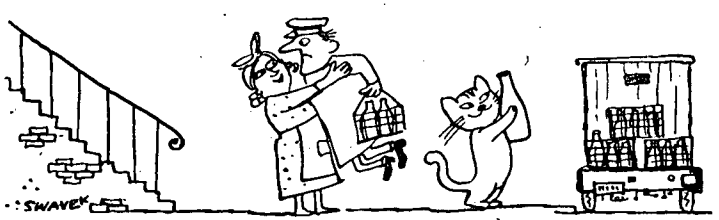
GEOFFREY WILLANS, *Crisis Cottage*

Settling In

The cat and the woman
Came into the house.
She looked at the view,
He looked for a mouse;
She swept up a room
And arrayed a shelf;
He sat in the sunlight
And washed himself.

She straightened a picture;
He studied a crack.
Then they heard the milkman
Somewhere out back.
As they hurried together
To the kitchen door,
She hummed to herself,
He purred once more!

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *New House*



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MAN OF HATE

He saw the cold eyes on him bitter and implacable

by JACLAND MARMUR

THERE was this deep, enduring hatred in the man. He came out of solid shadow cast along the foreshore by the jute and timber sheds, walking into brilliant sun-glare on Lopanga Jetty.

Mr. David Gorman, standing at its seaward edge, the launch below him rustling quietly against the ladder in a pool of dappled water, heard the measured footfalls on the planking at his back. He did not turn around. He knew it would be Joseph Cardin, tall gaunt owner of the Cardin Line, white-clad in fresh, crisp drill, his face the same grey iron mask.

So David Gorman stood unstirring on the landing-jetty, brown cheek ridged by sunfire. He kept staring out to where the S.S. *Cardinan* lay motionless at anchor in Lopanga Roads, her cargo booms dark fingers angulating at the sky. Here on the north-west Luzon coast, her ailing captain, Homer Bledson, came ashore and died. She was a ship without a master. Mr. Gorman was her chief mate.

He could hear the heavy footfalls louder at his back. Then suddenly they stopped.

"The captain left an entry in the log book," Joseph Cardin's hard voice said.

"I know, sir."

"He wrote down your appointment to be master on his death." The voice was flat and harsh. "He wrote that you were eminently fit to take command."

"I know that too, sir. Captain Bledson was my friend."

"It was against my wish!" The taut voice cracked the words out like a whiplash.

David Gorman turned at last. He saw the cold eyes on him, bitter and implacable. The *Cardinan*'s first officer stood silent for a moment. On the heat-washed jetty of an open roadstead, full in blinding sun-glare, they opposed each other. Mr. Gorman, in the irons of control, resisted such an unforgiving hatred with silence. But his grey eyes narrowed, and along his sun-

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burnt cheek the muscles worked in ripples for an instant and were still. His voice was slow and quiet when he spoke.

"Ten years ago you warned me I would never have command of any ship of yours. Ten years ago in Frisco, Mr. Cardin. Well, it is your right. You are the owner. You are in the ship now for the passage home. She is without a master still. I have not signed the captain's entry in the log."

"I warned you also, Mr. Gorman, not to stay in my employ!"

"I am a stubborn man."

"You are a foolish one as well. I told you then, I tell you now! You should have stayed in Navy brass where any boy's life is a thing of unimportance, and decision is a thing that has no heart. Here in the merchant ships, I'll break you, Gorman—I will!" The hatred boiled and broke. The beetling white brows knit together, and the grey head turned away. "The *Cardinolan*'s chief mate is in line for master," the shipowner said. "Unfortunately, she will not be in Manila for two days. Your second officer has only first mate's papers, and I cannot give the ship to him in typhoon season. Neither will I chance having an unknown skipper flown up from Manila. So—"

"I suggest you take the ship yourself." The chief mate's voice was dry. "You have extra master's papers, Mr. Cardin."

"I have thought of it!" the other snapped. "It is against my firm's policy. I have cancelled Captain Bledson's entry in the log. I have written another, as owner. The appointment is purely temporary. As acting master only, Mr. Gorman, you will take the *Cardinan* as far as San Francisco."

"I could easily refuse."

"You won't! The Navy trained you well." The cold eyes bored through David Gorman. "You won't refuse an order." The gaunt man turned abruptly. He went down the ladder to the waiting launch.

The *Cardinan*'s new master heard the engine cough down there. He did not stir. He heard the water rustling with a sound like coolness. Then a deep voice hailed. A voice that had a sound like the Navy, a voice with gravel in its throat.

"Shall I send the boat back for you, Captain?"

That was Jensen down there, bosun of the *Cardinan*. He had heard. He knew. Captain—the title passed with ease between his lips: he'd called the same man by the same word long ago.

So David Gorman looked down, saying gravely, "In an hour, Jensen. I must clear the ship. You stow your booms. Tell Mr. Harding he may heave the anchor to short stay."

The *Cardinan*'s new master, seeing Jensen's face uplifted, wind-scarred, weather-brown from all the years at sea, felt a

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strong kinship with him. Send the boat back in an hour, Jensen."

"Ay, ay, Captain. In an hour. I send the boy." The blue eyes bubbled with some pride or pleasure. "Paul learns good."

The launch sheered off, its engine noise assaulting the hot, bright stillness.

David Gorman watched its bubbling white wake curve away. He saw the owner on the stern thwart and the bosun's big shape upright, Navy style, the tiller bar against his knee. Out there, across a space of windless water, he could see the *Cardinan*, her dark hull blotting out the rock-strewn channel entrance from the China Sea, the brown haze from her funnel rising straight aloft.

How many times had he seen men like Jensen, coxswains in the Navy lifeboats, rounding smartly to the ladders of distant ships at anchor? He could remember the laughter of men pouring back on board from shore leave. Laughter was important in a war. There was no laughter left in Joseph Cardin.

David Gorman frowned. There is a sadness in the eyes of captains who have seen active service; it was in him still. Men die in war—the young, the brave. They sail away to nowhere. Are they swallowed in the trackless ocean, in the throats of great gales, in the thunder of the guns? It is hatred that kills them. Hatred always kills. Captains of ships on active service can only sign the neatly typed reports.

Mr. Gorman, in full sunlight on Lopanga Jetty in his merchant khakis, could remember how the water looked, that time ten years ago and more, when hatred, like a brutal tempest, swept all the oceans of the earth. He could remember how the gunfire sounded, how the flame-sheets belched. He could remember Eniwetok, Saipan, and the grey ships at anchor in Ulithi.

Most of all, he remembered how one boy had looked, lean, dark-headed, stiffly at attention with a new draft standing for inspection on the main deck of the American destroyer *John Grant* in Pearl Harbour. Maybe that was where it really started, back in 1944, between himself and Joseph Cardin. Captains ought to be impersonal. He should have had the boy detached. He should have sent him to some other tin can than his own.

Maybe that was where the thing began.

David Gorman frowned. He wasn't on Lopanga Jetty now. Across the glaring water, in the *Cardinan*, the cargo booms were swaying down. He didn't hear the winches hissing. He was far away in space and time . . .

He was on the main deck of the fleet destroyer U.S.S. *John Grant*. Commander David Gorman, her commanding officer. He was walking slowly past a line of new young men, big Jensen

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at his side. Halvor Jensen was the ship's chief bosun's mate. The captain reached the last man.

"Cardin, sir," the boy said smartly. "Joseph Cardin, first seaman."

"Cardin? That's a fine name. Are you Joseph Cardin's son, the Cardin Line from San Francisco?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Then you'll do all right. I sailed in your father's ships before the war."

"Yes, sir. I know." A quick grin flashed across the youngster's lips. "My sister, Laura, sir," he blurted, "she sends—"

"You are a seaman, not a messenger!" the captain's voice cracked sharply. "You have broken security if you mentioned your ship or her location in a letter home. Don't you know that, Cardin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then remember it!"

The skipper turned away at once. At his back he heard the Chief give counsel to the new men. Then that rasping voice dismissed them. And that night the ships went forward.

They sailed eastward in bright moonlight, four lean fleet destroyers with the U.S.S. *John Grant* last in division column. No one who has ever seen them, dark against a night sky, crouching, full of power and destruction, can forget their awesome look.

The U.S.S. *John Grant* was lucky. The great holocaust around the Marianas didn't touch her. Lucky *Grant*! She saw how burning islands looked, shell splashes all around her. She saw ships erupt at night in gushing flame. She saw the diving planes bore in from nowhere, hurling deadly rain from heaven's vault. She saw them plunge down, trailing smoke across a sky pockmarked with five-inch gunfire. She remained unscathed. Lucky, lucky *Grant*!

Someone must pay for luck like that. The balance must be struck. Towards the year's end, when the war roared over toward the Philippines, she paid her share. But she was lucky still. Her share was small.

The great December typhoon found her on its outer fringe. The lucky *Grant* was shepherding some damaged cripples to Ulithi. She was probing underwater contact on the gale-lashed water when a single Jap plane droned out of that sullen sky and crash-dived on her. Flame erupted on the ocean close to the ship and metal splinters rained. The *Grant* had only four dead when it ended. She was lucky, all right; even David Gorman knew it.

Luck is only for survivors, though. The others are luck's hostages. Young Joseph Cardin's name was among those four.

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Captains sign the neatly typed reports. The telegrams are sent to next of kin. Sometimes the captains will write letters. David Gorman didn't. When the lucky *Grant* came home, he looked up addresses in his notebook. That was how he spent his leave. He went to Utah, Iowa, and Kansas. Then he came to San Francisco. And before he went to Joseph Cardin, he saw Laura Cardin first.

"He wanted to give me a message from you, Laura, when he joined the ship in Pearl," he told her in the living-room up on Pacific Heights. "I had to cut him short. It seems—"

"It was my love I sent."

"It reached me anyhow."

"I knew it would." Her blonde head tilted. This was how he always thought of her, up on the *Grant*'s bridge, in the chart room, out there where the hatred and the fury was. "Do you want to tell me, David? About Joe?"

"I must see your father first."

"We'll go together."

"No!"

She was looking at him, faintly frowning. There was some trouble in him, and she knew. She always knew. Suddenly she smiled. Her gentle voice said firmly, "We'll go together."

So they did. She drove him down to the Embarcadero pier where all the Cardin Line ships berthed. They went up the wooden steps to where the owner's office was. And they went in together. They saw Joseph Cardin there.

"It's good of you to come," the gaunt man said. He stood against the office windows. Winter sunlight streamed in on him. You could see the glitter of it out there on the water of the Bay. The shipping hooted faintly, and the noise of vessels working cargo made a droning monotone. "I'm glad you brought him, Laura," Joseph Cardin said. "Won't you sit down?"

"There isn't much, sir, I can say." David Gorman sat quietly in front of the desk, the girl beside him. "As his captain, Mr. Cardin, I want to tell you Joe was a grand fellow. I hope that helps."

"Of course it helps. Where did it happen?"

"In the Philippine Sea."

"How did it happen?"

"It's better not to speak of it."

"I must know." The owner of the Cardin Line sat at his teakwood desk now, arms extended on it, craggy brows knit. "You sailed as chief mate in my ships before this war. You know my mind. I want my log books accurate. How did it happen? I must know."

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"It is better not to speak of it, Mr. Cardin."

"I must know!"

"As escort to some damaged vessels, we were investigating submarine contact." The commander's voice was just a level murmur now. "The sea was high. A Jap plane, a Betty, came dropping out of heavy scud. I don't know where she came from in such weather. Probably she was lost. She crashed, narrowly missing the deck. Three people in the starboard 40-mm-gun-turret died of splinter wounds."

"And Joe was one of them?"

"No, sir, he wasn't. Joe was on the port side. When the plane crashed and exploded and the ship heeled over, he was flung overboard."

"You mean he wasn't hurt? wasn't wounded?"

"No, sir. I think not."

A silence then. The girl looked quickly at her father, grey-green eyes a little wide. He sat motionless a moment; then his voice said thinly, "And you could not pick him up?"

"No, sir. We could not."

"You tried?" The dull voice still kept probing tragedy. "You put the lifeboat over? You—"

"Mr. Cardin, I am deeply sorry. Joe was a grand fellow. I came to tell you that, to offer what small sympathy I can. Things happen like this. It is better not to speak of it too much."

The gaunt man in the leather chair sat rigid. From his lips words dropped like metal pellets on an iron deck. "Did you—search—the area?"

Again the silence. David Gorman's eyes were sad. How do you tell a man whose son has died the cruel way it happened? Would the anguish be more bearable if death could always be heroic? Can you bolster courage with a lie? The stillness hung like that an instant. Commander Gorman blinked.

"No, sir," he said with slowness. "Responsibility was mine. I did not search the area. It was not possible."

"You simply—let him drown." The words were in a whisper almost. Bitter. Harsh. The grey, hard iron mask began to pass across that crag-browed face, and David Gorman saw it, saw the hatred slowly grow.

Still he addressed it, knowing that the truth alone would vindicate him. He was saying, "Mr. Cardin, you have been a seaman for a long time. And a master mariner. There was a whole gale blowing and the sea was high. Manœuvring was dangerous. I held responsibility for the safety of three damaged vessels. There are nearly three hundred people under my command in the *John Grant*." His slow voice hesitated, held the

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stillness tautly for a moment. Then he said with firmness, "No, it was impossible. I made no search."

"He was my only son. You—simply let him drown."

The dull voice echoed in that room. The January sunlight spattered at the gaunt, grey cheek of Joseph Cardin. From somewhere beyond the pierheads came the long blaring siren of an outward-bound ship; it sounded muffled in there.

The man stood up. He stood unstirring for a moment, staring emptily at space. "The Navy!" he said loudly.

He looked down then, eyes as cold as ice. "Get out—get out of here! You left the Cardin Line to go on active service. The law requires that I return your berth to you if you come back. Take my advice; do not come back!"

His hatred curled around each word. "Stay in the heartless, blasted Navy—that's where you belong! If you come back, you'll be a chief mate or a second till you die. I'll break you, Gorman! Don't come back! You'll never have command. Never—not in any merchant ship afloat!"

He stood unstirring, icy-eyed, his face as grey as ash. David Gorman came slowly to his feet. He did not look at Laura. She was still seated. He murmured slowly, "Mr. Cardin, log books must be accurate. You trained me well. I could not lie. Not to a seaman who has held command himself. You ought to know—"

"Get out!"

"A moment, sir." The naval voice still held its quietness. "Laura and I had already decided I would stay in the Navy after the war. I cannot do that now. If I'm still alive when the war ends, Mr. Cardin, I'll come back. I'll come back here and sail in Cardin ships. I—"

"*Get out!*"

"I hope that Laura will—"

"If Laura leaves this room with you, I no longer have a daughter either."

Commander David Gorman made no answer, and he did not turn his head. The girl sat quietly in silence, blonde head tipped. The sunlight streamed into that dockside room, splashed on the model of an early Cardin vessel in its cradle by the wall. There was this stillness in there for some instants, and the girl was the centre of it. Then she slowly rose. She stood there, tall, erect, something hopeful behind her eyes.

"I am sorry, Father," she said gently. "There is too much hatred in the world already. I love David very much. I must go with him."

The man who towered gauntly at the teakwood desk said

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nothing. His face a stony mask, Joseph Cardin did not stir. There was nothing to be done. They went out together, Laura Cardin and the skipper of the U.S.S. *John Grant*. They went in silence arm-in-arm.

Before that leave was over, they were married. Then the grey ships sailed again. The war boiled to its frightful end.

When David Gorman left the Navy, he came back as he said he would. He came to sail in Joseph Cardin's ships.

That's how it was. That's why he stood in the brilliant sun-glare on Lopanga Jetty in his merchant-navy uniform now, staring out across the shimmer on the water towards the *Cardinan*. She was at short stay now, booms all nested. She was waiting for her master, ready for the sea. Her master? The command was purely temporary. It was like a bone thrown to a dog. Honour wasn't in it. Joseph Cardin fed his hatred still.

"All ready, Captain!"

The voice was startling, strong and clear. David Gorman looked down quickly, saw the launch against the landing-ladder and the young man in the cockpit looking upward, eyes alight and faintly grinning. He remembered then. Of course, this was the boy the bosun said he'd send back for the captain in an hour. Had an hour passed already?

This boy looked the way young Joseph Cardin had. Except that he was fair. But he had the same bubbling gaiety in his eyes, the same fine wonder and the same young strength.

"Thank you. Coming now," the temporary captain of the *Cardinan* called back, and started down the ladder to the waiting launch.

So the *Cardinan* sailed from Lopanga Roads, dipping into long swells of the China Sea, with David Gorman on the captain's bridge. The *Cardinan*'s new master took her through Balintang Channel, and the long unhurried rollers of the vast Pacific marched down at her from the north and east. She dipped her head into the blue-green flood, rocking in an acre of her own white foam. She was homeward bound.

Joseph Cardin had the owner's room. He rarely spoke. He took the swing chair at the head of the table at meal-times in the main saloon so that every officer would know David Gorman's command was a technical necessity: he was a chief mate still. When the cirrus haze began to gather in the south and east Joseph Cardin frowned at it. He held no counsel with his captain. David Gorman saw it, too. He understood its threat. He understood the implications of the sticky atmosphere before the glass began its steady drop. He was plotting storm tracks on

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the chart before the typhoon warning came. Before he wrote his orders in the night book, he hauled northward off the course. In the wheelhouse, Joseph Cardin heard him give the order.

"Left rudder, Quartermaster. Steady on zero-one-zero."

"Left rudder, sir. Swinging. Zero-four-zero. Zero-two-zero. Steady on zero-one-zero now."

"Steer that."

"Ay, ay, sir. Course zero-one-zero."

"We will catch it soon, Mr. Cardin," David Gorman said quietly. "We have lifelines rigged and everything secure. I estimate the storm track is recurving. I mean to keep the ship in the left-hand semicircle on this course till it has passed."

Joseph Cardin nodded, eyes still icy and his face the same grey iron mask. The ship was sliding at great, lumpy hills of ocean in the darkness, white foam glittering each time her bows crashed down to lift with cataracts of boiling water pouring from her foc'sle-head. The mounting gale began to chatter at the weather cloth, went whining past the funnel stays, and overhead the thick, black typhoon clouds were massing.

By the middle watch the *Cardinan* was labouring in heavy seas. Great squalls assaulted her. The high, wild shriek of typhoon howled around her, booming sometimes like the thunder of great guns, and sometimes screaming like the shrilling from an insane throat. Torrential squalls swept across her, slashing rain pellets at her out of pitch-black darkness like wind-driven steel. The *Cardinan* kept labouring against enormous anarchy, in single combat with the great Pacific gale.

In the morning watch it happened. The new third mate—a young quartermaster who had been promoted in Lopanga—was the one who saw it first. From behind the forward window of the wheelhouse he pointed downward, crying warning. Captain Gorman looked there, waited till the green-white boil of water cleared the foredeck. Then he saw it. Flutter of dark canvas down there, flailing in the gale. The forehatch heavy-weather tarpaulin adrift!

The next green hill of ocean slammed against the *Cardinan*. She lifted, but she was too late. Great spouts of water hurled aloft, came tumbling inboard, roaring clean across the deck. The captain stepped out to the bridge wing, swinging there in all the fury between sullen sky and raging sea. He made his estimate and his decision. If hatch-boards shattered down there under that tremendous hammering, the *Cardinan* could not survive. He came back dripping, water pouring from his oilskins, streaming from his face.

"Mr. Harding!" he called sharply. "Set the oil bags dripping

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fore and aft. Tell the bosun we shall want two others. Volunteers. I'll go along myself. You watch the steering. Wind on the starboard quarter, Mr. Harding. Keep her steady. Steady as you can."

That's how it was. The captain thought he saw the cold and unforgiving eyes of Joseph Cardin on him for a moment just before he climbed the ladder to the lower deck. He wasn't sure of that. But he was sure of Jensen. Jensen's big scarred face had the glow of combat on it, as he waited to assault the sea he knew so intimately.

"I've brought the boy," the bosun screamed against the gale. "Paul learns. He's strong. And Pollard from the third mate's watch. We are all ready, Captain! Say the word."

They crawled out on the foredeck, hanging to the lifelines. They crawled out where fury was. Down there the great green hills of ocean towered over them, the steep flanks glittering, white-ribbed with foam. The snow-capped hills marched towards the *Cardinan*, hurled her aloft, raced forward past her with unhurried, frightful speed.

Sea-booted, oilskins lashed, and topping mauls on lanyards, the men looked feeble in a boil of foaming water. They looked small and dark down there beneath the racing scud of storm. The heavy tarpaulin was thundering. It had to be subdued. The captain and big Jensen led the way.

They never knew how long the labour lasted. It seemed endless. David Gorman could remember how the ocean looked, the seething, hissing sound of it. Through sheeting sprays he saw the faces of the others, Pollard, seaman in the third mate's watch, and Paul, the boy who had the glitter and the youthful wonder in his eyes, the boy who might almost have been young Joseph Cardin.

Mostly he remembered Jensen, hanging to the lifeline when the task was done. Big Jensen stood there for an instant, panting, glow of triumph on his dripping face, his arm downflung to point to the captured, heavy tarpaulin. It was secure again. "You, now!" the voice with gravel in its throat roared out against the gale. "You, now—behave!"

Then they were struggling aft to climb the well-deck ladder. Up there David Gorman hung on for some moments. Haggard-eyed, he felt the weariness assault him, and he had to shake it off. He was up the ladder to the bridge before he heard the far-off shout. He stopped, spun round. The shout held terror for a seaman when the great gales blew. It wasn't true! It couldn't be! Then thinly, like an echo against all the tumult of the ocean and the wind, it came again.

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" —overboard! Man overboard! "

He saw the bosun heave a life-belt over, saw the big man racing towards him, wide-eyed, mouth agape. Halfway up the ladder, Jensen stopped, his face contorted, arm outflung. Behind him, others stood down on the boat-deck at the foot of the ladder, a small tight group in oilskins, all the dripping faces looking upward at the master of the *Cardinan.*

" Paul! " the bosun screamed. " It's Paul! Sea washed him over! Port-side boat, sir! Can I launch—" His gravel voice stopped short. Wide-eyed, he turned his head, and for an instant looked out at the raging sea. His head spun back at once, the sea-scarred face uplifted, ash-grey face of agony. His arm dropped to his side. His hoarse voice said, " You—you cannot. Can you, Captain? "

David Gorman looked at him. He saw the other faces too, the eyes all on him. Only instants passed, the brief, heartbreaking instants between life and death. He knew the owner, Joseph Cardin, was beside him on the bridge wing. He wheeled on him. The sadness touched his eyes. His taut voice whipped out, " Mr. Cardin, I give you the decision. Now! I will appoint you master. Now! I can. You are well qualified. There are no submarines. There is no enemy except the sea. I give you judgment of the weather. If you think the risk of ship and men is proper, take the conn. I will command the boat myself! Jensen and five volunteers will go. You give the order. Give it now! "

The gaunt man stood unstirring. Underfoot he felt the *Cardinan* labouring heavily. His bleak eyes looked out across a wilderness of white-ribbed ocean, saw the great hills marching, all the crests obscured in spindrift whipped off by the howling tumult of typhoon. The ship crashed down. The white sea boiled across her deck. She lifted slowly. Joseph Cardin stood unblinking like that for an instant.

" No," he said at last. The voice was flat and dull, the eyes in torment. " No. The boat, her crew—they would only drown." He made a gesture with one hand. He let it fall at once. His voice was lifeless. " Hold the course," he said.

He turned. He went into the wheelhouse. He was standing in there, staring bleakly into empty space, when David Gorman and the bosun came in. Jensen stood beside his captain. He stood there in silence, big face twisted, huge paws at his sides. He stared at nothing. Maybe he could hear the great gale howling. Maybe not. He stood alone, in agony.

In the grey, sickly daylight of the wheelhouse, one man stood

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wide-footed on the gratings at the helm, eyes downward on the compass card, its feeble glow upflung to touch his cheek. There was a stillness in there, stillness in the core of tumult. And the moments passed.

"Captain," Jensen said into the stillness in a whisper, tight and hoarse, "Captain, Paul swam strong. You think . . . you think that it is . . . over yet?"

"Yes," said David Gorman gently. "Yes, Jensen. I think it is over now."

"I was a boy in Grand Bank schooners, Captain," Jensen said, his voice the same hoarse whisper. "I do not forget the custom. I request permission, sir, to ring eight bells for Paul."

"Permission is granted, Jensen."

The big man hesitated. Then he stepped up to the binnacle. His trembling hand reached towards the overhead. He took the lanyard in his fist. No one was watching him. He had the right to solitude. The grief was his, the honour his alone to do. The captain and his officers kept staring forward through the streaming weather glass. They watched the raging ocean and the driving scud. The ship kept plunging.

And then Jensen rang the wheelhouse bell. He rang the double strokes with firmness. They came clear and loud, a seaman's requiem, the last peal thinly echoing. And then the stillness came again.

"Who was he, Jensen?" That grey voice did not disturb the stillness. It was Joseph Cardin's voice. "Who was the boy?" it asked.

"He was my only son."

The stillness closed once more. It lasted for some moments. Then the owner's voice said in a murmur, "I request permission, Captain Gorman, to ring out eight bells for Joseph."

The master of the *Cardinan* turned slowly. Joseph Cardin stood beside the bosun. He was staring off into space. Staring at his hatred, maybe. Maybe seeing it with clarity at last. He did not stir till David Gorman nodded. He took it for forgiveness, maybe. Then his hand reached up. He held the lanyard firmly. And the bells tolled out again. He tolled at last his requiem to hatred.

He moved over to where David Gorman stood. He was about to speak. He didn't, though. Not yet. It was too soon for speech. Big Jensen spoke instead. "Captain, let me steer. I got to. If I steer, I be all right."

"Yes, Jensen. Take the wheel."

He did. The feel of wheelspokes in his fists could give him solace. No one watched him, but his grief was not so lonely now.

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The sea noise thundered in the wheelhouse and the gale kept up its whining, whistling howl. Against it, David Gorman heard the owner speak at last. "Laura," Joseph Cardin said. "How is she, David? how is Laura?"

"Fine, sir. She's fine."

"The children?"

"David will be four next week. We think he looks a lot like you. The oldest is already six. We named him Joseph, sir."

"Thank you. I would like to see them, Captain Gorman." Joseph Cardin blinked. It was the second time he called the master of the *Cardinan* by his rightful title. Then he blinked again. The iron mask was gone at last from Joseph Cardin's face. "You shall have command of any ship of mine you wish."

He said it quickly. And he turned away at once. He spoke to Jensen at the wheel. He wished to give that sea-scarred man some honour, some small signal of his deep respect. "I ask you to my cabin. We will have a drink together, Jensen."

"Thank you, no." The big man did not raise his head. He kept his eyes glued on the compass-card. He knew where truth and comfort lay. It gave him dignity. "It is too soon, sir. I just steer. I got to. If I steer, I be all right."

He steered with care.

Hey! I've got a bone to pick with you!

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FLOWER OF NIGHT

She heard Ah Yuk's light girlish laugh coming from his room

by JOHN DEW

PAULINE disliked Fenner. Although she had not met him yet she was fully prepared to dislike him from the time Harold had been told he was to share their bungalow.

Of course, it wasn't, strictly speaking, their own bungalow. That was the trouble. It belonged to the Government who rented it to its officials. The whole thing had been done curtly and officially with the stroke of a pen. You had to take it or leave it; and if you left it you were houseless, because the housing shortage was as acute in Kuala Tidor as anywhere else in the world.

She nagged Harold for a week to do something about it.

"It was bad enough sharing with your mother when we were on leave at home," she grumbled, "but this'll be far worse. There's no privacy in these tropical bungalows—they're all verandahs and partitions. It will be almost as bad as sharing a tent with a stranger."

Harold had slowly stroked the few brown streaks which lay stranded by his receding hair line. Although he was a man of some consequence and manipulated several strings he had been unable to pull the right one.

"I've done all I can, dear. That's all there is to it," he said helplessly.

"You ought to have put your foot down," she replied scornfully. Even as she made the remark she realized the futility of it. Harold was very light of foot; it had helped him to climb to the topmost rungs of the ladder of success.

And there she had left the matter. She could not contend with the heat and Harold; both were amorphous and irritating.

The heat lay over the land like a mist. It worked slowly, insidiously; blurring and distorting and laying its mantle of mildew on everything. It wrapped people in its steamy folds, and left them limp and exhausted. Pauline's irritability, like a sore, quickly turned septic in the corrupting heat.

Fenner arrived one hot afternoon after Pauline had risen from

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her rest. She awoke from her sleep feeling tired and unrefreshed. It was a little cooler now, and as she looked out of the window she watched white cumulus clouds forming a vast anvil on the horizon.

The sun was lower and slanted down the valley of the public gardens which lay below the bungalow. The white lotus flowers in an ornamental lake seemed as if they were floating on fire where the sun's rays touched the water. From a group of houses on a nearby hill she could see the evening procession of prams and small English children with their white-coated amahs emerging to play now the sun was beginning to disappear behind the jungle-clad hills in the distance.

Their piping voices echoed in the valley and it was with something of a shock that Pauline was reminded of her own two children away in England at school. It was odd, she thought, that almost two whole days had passed without her thinking of them.

Fenner drew up with a squeal of tyres as his black sports car came to a sudden stop outside the bungalow. She watched him unload two suitcases and carry them up the verandah steps.

As he went down the steps to get some more luggage she left the bedroom and went into the sitting-room. She stood for a moment by his cases, waiting for him to come up. On the side of one case, in faded letters, she read: *Lt. Col. Michael Fenner, M.C.* She got an impression of his dark, aggressive face and level black eyebrows as he reached the top of the steps.

"You're Colonel Fenner?" she asked coolly, as she briefly touched his hand.

"Without the 'Colonel' now, Mrs. Barker," he smiled.

She called the Chinese boy and told him to remove the luggage and then invited Fenner to sit down. He took the cigarette she offered him from a carved walnut box.

"I'm awfully sorry about having to share your house," he said as he lit her cigarette. "I'm sorry for you and your husband, and I'm sorry for myself. I was told everyone here had to share houses and I did all I could to stay at Bukit Bulan. You'll find me no problem—I'm out a lot and I'm fairly punctual."

"Really?" Pauline resented his self-assurance. He had been in the country only a very short time, she knew. "Have you been in Malaya long?" she asked purposely.

"Not long. I've been District Officer in Bukit Bulan for about nine months."

"Oh yes?" Pauline cut in. "My husband was stationed there at one time—before the war, of course. It was in 1932, I think, before we were married."

She was careful to mention the date as it would give him some idea of their position, if he hadn't found out already.

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Fenner smiled. He had already found out the subtle distinction of belonging to this golden era. In the small, almost classless European community it had become a social yardstick more arbitrary than the accident of birth.

Pauline glanced at him sharply. She was nettled by his obvious amusement. She meant to put him in his place and to keep him in it. Suddenly she realized that he was probably a few years older than she was and felt discomfited. He looked about thirty-four, she thought. He was Harold's junior by many years, however, and the seniority of her position seemed to her therefore to restore the balance.

She got up and took him to his room. It was small, hot, and furnished only with an almirah and a dressing-table. A dingy mosquito-net drooped like a widow's veil over the single bed. A door led through onto a small verandah on which were a rickety cane chair and table. A coil of cane binding like a broken spring had unwound itself from a table leg.

She said, " The bathroom's down those stairs on the verandah —the shower doesn't work but there's a Shanghai jar instead."

" Hm . . . quite like the old days before the war," commented Fenner.

Pauline compressed her lips tightly and said nothing. Spots of colour stood out in her pale cheeks. She walked over to the door and pressed the bell. " We've got in an extra servant to look after you. She'll be your dhobi and do your mending as well—You speak Malay, I suppose? "

" Yes, some. Is she a Malay or Chinese? " he asked.

There was a knock at the door and a dainty Chinese girl entered the room. She wore a flowered *san fu*; the neat little jacket emphasized the smallness of her waist and a pair of blue brocade slippers showed beneath her trousers. A white frangipani flower glowed against the blackness of her hair and filled the room with its heavy fragrance. Pauline sniffed audibly.

" This is Ah Yuk," she said, turning to Fenner. " She'll look after your room. She can speak English fairly well in case you have any difficulty with the local language," she added patronizingly.

Fenner smiled at the girl and spoke a few words of Chinese to her. She gave him a sudden friendly smile which illuminated the delicate impassivity of her face. After an exchange of courtesies the girl left the room.

Pauline looked astonished. " I didn't know you spoke Chinese," she said, with a trace of embarrassment.

" I don't very well. I did a course in the Army some years ago but I haven't kept it up. I'll get Ah Yuk to teach me again."

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Pauline raised her eyebrows. She walked to the door and opened it. "We usually have dinner at nine o'clock. Perhaps you'd like to join us for a drink at eight—I don't think you've met my husband before?"

"No, I haven't," Fenner replied. "Thanks very much, I'd like to. You dress for dinner, I suppose?"

"No. Only if we have *guests*," she said with emphasis on the last word.

Harold arrived whilst she was changing for dinner. "I'm sorry I'm late," he said, as he placed his white jacket on the bed. "I meant to be back for tea to meet Fenner, but the committee meeting didn't end till half past six. I dropped in at the Club with Parkinson to have a stengah on the way home."

"Fenner's arrived all right," she said grimly. "I asked him to have a drink with us at eight."

"What's he like?"

"Ex-Army. Very self-assured. You know—with a sort of know-all look about him."

"Oh, I don't suppose he'll be too bad when we get used to him," Harold replied reassuringly. He took a towel from the rail and walked towards the bathroom. At the top of the steps he paused.

"Who was that attractive Chinese girl I saw in the sitting-room as I came in?" he asked.

"Oh, that's the new amah. She arrived this morning."

"She looks more like a taxi-dancer at one of the cabarets."

"Yes, she does a bit. I can't stand the frangipani in her hair. It smells the house out—I shall have to speak to her about it. She looks sly, too, but as she's a relation of cookie's she ought to be all right."

As Pauline spoke, she brushed her hair in front of the dressing-table. It was short and boyish except for the soft waves which she patted into place, and it suited her small, piquant face with its wide, intolerant eyes.

At eight o'clock Pauline and Harold went into the sitting-room. It was a long, wide room, open at the front and sides except for the low balcony wall. Some cane chairs and a sofa were grouped together under a ceiling fan like an oasis in a desert of dark polished floor. A standard lamp stood by the sofa.

Harold went over to an opium stool on which a tray of drinks had been placed and poured out two stengahs. He handed one to Pauline and sat down. He was coatless but looked neat and precise in his white shirt and spotted bow-tie. He tore open a bundle of airmail newspapers which had arrived that day. He

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took the latest one and cracked it ostentatiously as he opened it. It was the signal that he did not wish to be disturbed.

It was the best part of the day. Pauline felt and looked cool in a dark linen frock. A breeze from the verandah lightly stirred her hair. Outside the cicadas and crickets were shrilling incessantly under the full moon.

Fenner came into the room as Harold was pouring himself a second drink. He looked up at him through the upper part of his bifocal spectacles and his eyes came glassily into focus like those of a rising fish. He straightened himself and came forward to meet Fenner. After Pauline had introduced them Harold poured him a drink and sat down. The two men chatted inconsequentially for some time while Pauline watched them.

Harold, slightly ill at ease, was being ponderously affable in his attempt to find out more about Fenner. The personal anecdotes which he threw out as ground bait were dull fare that failed to tempt Fenner. In the course of the conversation he had given Fenner most of the details of his own personal history. He had been up at Oxford at one of the minor colleges.

"I think a university training is indispensable, don't you?" Harold asked him. "A wonderful recruiting-ground."

Fenner opened his cigarette case and handed it round. "It rather depends on the job. And on the college, too."

Harold quickly changed the subject. "And what do you think of the country?"

"Oh, I like it. Though it's rather depressing at times—no horizon."

"What do you mean?" asked Pauline, interested in spite of herself.

"You feel hemmed in by vegetation—you can sometimes hear it growing in your mind," Fenner explained.

"These are first impressions, surely?" Harold interposed.

"Yes, but I usually find those are the best. When you live in a place too long you overlook all sorts of significant things."

"I don't agree with you at all," Harold replied quickly. "You don't begin to know a country until you've been in it at least ten years."

Pauline listened with some embarrassment to Harold describing some of his earlier experiences in the country. Fenner sat with a polite but bored expression on his face.

"It's experience that counts," Harold was saying. "It's been proved over and over again."

Fenner smiled slowly. "Time and experience don't necessarily go hand in hand, as you suggest."

Their first conversation set the tone of their future relationship.

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Fenner was self-possessed, indifferent, and obviously accustomed to being in control. He was polite and considerate and Pauline could find no real cause for complaint, yet she resented him strongly. His presence filled the house with a quiet and remote masculinity that was disturbing.

She found herself more than usually careful over her appearance and hated herself for it. Even Harold seemed to be affected by him and had grown nervy and irritable. Once or twice he had tried to make friendly overtures, but Fenner was put off by his patronizing manner. Pauline and Harold were thrown together in a chafing companionship. Harold's dwarfed manhood needed the sympathy that she could not give and her vanity the balm he could not provide.

Fenner spent a good deal of time in the evenings learning Chinese with Ah Yuk. Pauline, in the sitting-room, could hear the murmur of their voices and sudden bursts of laughter from Fenner's verandah. It preyed on her to such an extent that she had to interrupt them by calling Ah Yuk to give her trivial tasks to do. The budding friendship flowered rankly in her mind.

She spoke to Harold about them. "You should *do* something, Harold," she complained. "She's always in his room—sometimes for as much as half an hour. I'm sure there's something going on."

Harold took off his glasses and polished them with his handkerchief. "I don't see what I can do," he answered slowly. "It doesn't seem to be quite proper, but I can't tell him to stop talking to her, can I?"

He put his glasses back on his nose and carefully folded his handkerchief.

"You could drop a hint ... ." suggested Pauline.

"No." He shook his head. "That wouldn't be much good. I think we'd better just keep a pretty sharp eye on them."

Pauline followed Harold's advice: she watched Ah Yuk carefully. She watched her when she served at table and when she spoke to Fenner. She hardly saw Fenner; it was the girl with her expressionless almond eyes that she saw when she watched. The fragrance of frangipani haunted her and was as offensive as incense to the devil inside her.

Then, one evening, as she was gardening she noticed that her favourite rose bush was being pushed aside by an upthrusting frangipani tree. The flower bed was nearly opposite Fenner's verandah but she was screened from his view by a bougainvillaea on the lawn. As she was about to cut down the frangipani she heard Ah Yuk's light laugh coming from Fenner's room. Her heart beat sickly as she moved forward to watch them unseen.

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As she did so, there was a bright golden flash as a pair of orioles, like couriers of the sun, swept down from a banyan tree and momentarily alighted on the bougainvillaea. She moved, and they disappeared into some distant trees, leaving the garden a darker place.

Pauline, without thinking, moved into the open to peer after the birds. She was filled with delight, and, in the golden afterglow of their visit, she forgot her suspicions.

Then she heard Fenner call out, " Did you see them, too? They usually come here at about this time."

He vaulted over the side of the verandah and came walking towards her. He had changed into a black-and-purple sarong and his bare chest was almost as brown as a Malay's.

" They're marvellous, aren't they? " he said, as he stood by her side.

Fenner, she thought with surprise, had also been caught by their glory. He looked at her with new interest and then glanced at the gardening-tools at her feet.

" I see you're ministering to the rose," he said.

" Yes—poor thing, it's getting a bit choked by all the tropical growth."

She moved her hand vaguely in the direction of the frangipani. Fenner leaned over the rose.

" It's got a faint scent," he said with animation. " Even the frangipani can't drown it. My God, how it brings back memories of home out here. Rose-garden memories . . . spring . . . a thrush on a branch . . . first love. Sentimental, perhaps, but fundamental, deeply rooted and eternal." He looked at her with a trace of embarrassment.

" I know," she replied. " That's really why I planted it. But English flowers don't do well out here—I've almost given up trying to grow them. They're like us, they become anaemic and pale."

" Yes, but they've got something, even then. Look at those things like bits of red stuff on the end of stalks."

" You mean cannas," she interrupted him with a smile.

" Yes, cannas. They're beautiful, exotic, but the rose has a charm of its own. You couldn't write a poem about a canna, could you? "

" No." Laughingly she agreed. She picked up the clippers that lay at her feet. " I'm going to cut down the frangipani to give the rose a chance."

" Mmm . . ." He shook his head slowly. " Can't you prune it so that they'll live side by side? "

" I hate frangipani," she said intensely.

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"Oh? Why?" He looked at her closely.

For a moment she was at a loss. "I don't know exactly. They remind me of the wreaths on Chinese hearses. Funereal," she said, lamely.

"Oh, I like them. They've got a heavy scent, I know, but it's characteristically Eastern—just a flavour of spice to prevent it from cloying. If I were sent one in England it would remind me of this place."

Pauline thought for a moment. "I don't think you'd like it at home. It would be far too heavy and out of place. It'd be as oppressive as those cloying scents used by dangerous, exotic women," she said laughingly.

"Yes, I know the sort," he agreed. "You meet them in lifts in West-End shops and you nearly suffocate."

They both laughed. Then Fenner said, "You know, the roses out here remind me of English women. They're pale. Charming, sometimes, in spite of their thorniness"—he glanced at her and went on quickly—"and Eastern women in England are like hothouse flowers. Their exotic brightness fades in our grey climate. A hot bright sun needs strong colours: a paler sun, subtler shades."

"Oh," she replied slowly, "you're really advising me to stick to tropical flowers in the tropics?"

"Yes, perhaps. That's what I shall probably do myself." He smiled enigmatically.

"You're quite a gardener, Mr. Fenner. But perhaps that isn't the right word?"

They stood silently. His words had been transmuted into gold by the alchemy of the orioles. She tried to hold each word and phrase a glittering captive, but they were as elusive as memories of a rose garden.

It was Harold who interrupted her thoughts. He trotted across the lawn in a mild fluster. "Parkinson's ill," he said breathlessly, "and I've got to go to Penang in his place to attend a conference."

"When?" Pauline asked.

"Tonight. I'll be returning by air tomorrow evening. You might get my things packed while I change."

He half ran back to the house, followed at a more leisurely pace by Pauline. He stopped suddenly and called to Fenner, "I almost forgot—" He mopped his brow with his handkerchief. "I'm afraid I shall have to put you to the trouble of staying the night in a hotel, Fenner. I don't object, personally, to your staying here, but it wouldn't be proper in the circumstances."

Soon after Harold had gone, Fenner went into the sitting-room,

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where he found Pauline reading. She put down her book and looked up at him.

"Ah Yuk's packing my bag. When she's finished, I'll be off—I don't want to compromise you by my presence," he said.

Pauline flushed. His cold aggressiveness hurt her. "I don't care a damn whether you stay or not," she answered with some defiance.

"Oh yes, you do—you're hidebound by convention. You've resented me because I didn't fit into your little pattern of society—because I don't tick in time to your master clock. You've even resented Ah Yuk because she taught me Chinese."

That wasn't the reason why she resented Ah Yuk, she now realized. "I've told you I don't mind whether you stay or not," she replied quietly.

He stood up and gave her a challenging glance. "I'll call your bluff. I accept your invitation." He summoned Ah Yuk and told her to unpack his bag. The girl glanced at Pauline and left the room without a word.

Fenner looked at Pauline. She felt the blood mounting to her cheeks and, while she managed to maintain a semblance of indifference, she felt curiously elated.

Fenner sat down again and smiled. "We might as well celebrate the occasion. We'll really give the neighbours something to talk about. Will you come out to dinner with me?"

Pauline was startled and confused by his sudden change of mood.

"Do you want to provide food for gossip or for me?" she replied, defensively flippant.

"Both," he replied, looking at her with approval. "We'll start in an hour."

Fenner drove fast and well. It was a fine, starlit night and they drove with the hood down. Pauline was filled with exhilaration as they rushed through the night air. Once they drove through a cloud of fireflies which hovered in their path like a cluster of star-dust. She cried out with delight as the pulsing, glowing insects parted on either side of them.

Suddenly, to her dismay, they swung off the road and into the drive of the Club.

"We'll have a drink here," Fenner said, as he pulled up outside the brightly lighted entrance, "just to let everyone see us together."

He was obviously doing it on purpose to test her, she thought angrily, but she was determined not to give way. He took her by the arm as they went up the steps.

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"You're very attractive . . ." he said reassuringly as they reached the top of the steps. "By far the loveliest rose in this English garden."

She felt suddenly indifferent to the glances she met as they passed through the lounge to a table on the balcony. Absurdly, she thought of the faces she saw as pink toy balloons which burst when she looked at them.

When they had finished their drinks Fenner suggested that they should go to a Chinese restaurant. "It's time you had dinner in an amusing place," he said, smiling.

On the way to the restaurant he took her hand. "You passed that with colours flying. I've never seen anything to match your cheeks and eyes as we walked into the lounge."

Pauline for once caught the spirit of Chinatown as they entered it, an alien world pulsing with life and light. Cymbals clashed with joy, sudden and frenzied, in a dark alley. Lanterns, distended with mirth, showed characters, beautiful and comical, dancing on their fat sides; the fragrance of burning joss-sticks rose to meet her mood.

It was nearly midnight when they got back home. The solitary standard lamp shed its aura on the furniture huddled together as if for comfort in the centre of the large dark room. As they entered the room Ah Yuk appeared from the darkness of the corridor. She looked sleepy and the frangipani was missing from her hair.

Pauline gave her a friendly smile and turned to Fenner. "What about a last brandy?" Her manner was a little proprietary.

"Yes, I'd like a nightcap. Good idea," he answered.

Pauline told the girl to get the drinks and then joined Fenner who stood leaning over the verandah. She stood close to him for a minute but moved away when Ah Yuk came back with the tray. Fenner went over to the opium stool and returned with the drinks.

From the garden the heavy fragrance of frangipani trees drifted in with the night breeze. On the ceiling one of the many lizards chuckled harshly.

"I wonder what the *chik-chak*'s got to laugh about?" Fenner said, as he turned to her.

"Oh, he's probably caught a nice juicy moth," she answered lightly. She breathed the night air and shivered slightly. "I wonder how the rose is?" she added inconsequentially.

"Asleep, I should think."

"Yes, I suppose so. It's the frangipani's turn now," she said with unconscious irony.

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He looked at her and then took her hand. For some moments they said nothing. Then he said: "There's always something sad about the end of a perfect evening."

"You've felt that, too?" she asked him.

"Yes. You feel as if you want to stay in the no-man's-land of midnight—not in yesterday, nor in today."

"Nor tomorrow," she added. "You make me feel like Cinderella at zero hour."

He put his arm round her. "But you're not wearing glass slippers."

"I wish I were. It was with the slippers she reconciled past, present, and future."

Fenner kissed her. For a moment she felt as if she, too, were wearing glass slippers.

Suddenly she heard a slight sound in the room and started away from him. Ah Yuk had entered the room and was picking up the tray of drinks. She left as silently as she had come in.

Pauline did not know whether she felt triumph or fear.

"I think it's time we went to bed," she whispered breathlessly.

Pauline did not see Fenner until after lunch. He came up the steps of the verandah and sat down beside her on the sofa.

"Pauline," he said, taking her hand, "I've been thinking for some time now of going to live on my own . . ."

She could not say a word. He went on, "I've managed to get a couple of rooms in a Chinese house and I've told the landlord I'm going to move in today. It's better this way, isn't it?"

She thought for a long time. "I suppose so," she agreed dully.

He stood up and said, "I'm going to pack now but I'll be back in a few minutes."

Pauline sat realizing the inevitability of the situation. And with the realization came a curious feeling of relief. The unfamiliar world in which she had lived for a short while was too strange, too intense in its reality, almost unbearable.

Fenner came back and sat down beside her again. "You remember," he said slowly, "what we said yesterday about the rose garden and its memories?"

"Yes," she replied wonderingly.

"This is one of them . . ."

"Sentimental?" she asked a little bitterly.

"No . . . fundamental. Like the story of Cinderella—it also lives on in the rose garden."

He kissed her and stood up to go. "The other flowers—they belong elsewhere, in another garden—the garden we die in."

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A little later when Ah Yuk came into the room carrying a basket and a bundle of her possessions, she understood his words. A frangipani blossom, like a white star, shone in the blackness of the girl's hair. She said, "I go home now . . ."

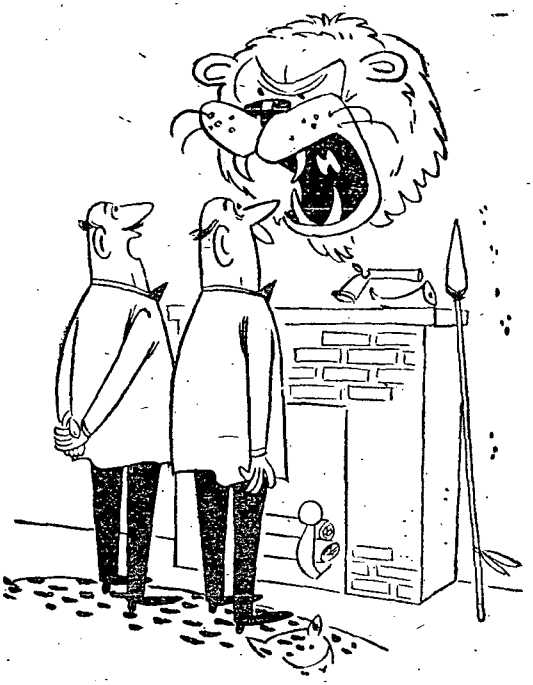
"Why?" asked Pauline in surprise.

"You ask me to look after Mr. Fenner. When he go, my work finish," she explained.

"Finishes?" Pauline asked. "I don't think so—not yet. Where are you going to work?" She knew the answer.

Ah Yuk was silent. She looked at Pauline steadily and then her eyes dropped. "I go work for Mr. Fenner. Before, he say when he has new house, I work for him. Now he has new house."

Pauline watched the girl go slowly and gracefully into the garden. The scent of frangipani lingered for a few moments in the room until it was borne away by the light evening breeze.



This poor fellow never had a chance. Swallowed my wife and died of food poisoning.

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IVORY JOE

He put on an extra-special performance for the spree that night

by JOHN PUDNEY

WE called him Ivory Joe, but his real name was August Zoob. He came from the Baltic, an exile from some now-forgotten tyranny. He kept his identity to himself, of course, and most of his history too. His name came out only on official papers and in these he would lie blatantly about his age but would always insist on stating his profession or trade as *Engineer*.

He was adamant about this, as he was in his refusal to offer any further explanation, either in or out of liquor. Not that anybody pressed him overmuch for he could hardly be expected to take much pride in describing himself as pub pianist and washer-up, which was a fair summary of his calling.

Apart from the tickling of the ivories, though, he was clever with his hands. He would sometimes mend a customer's watch, sitting up through the small hours beneath the bare electric-light bulb in the attic room where he "lived in." He was good with pin-tables, radio sets, and even television. He could fix cigarette-lighters, if properly approached.

He would take a drink or so when a job was done, but he would get in a huff if anyone suggested payment—and Joe's huffs were long sombre mysterious affairs, silent, steeped in tragic melancholy. He would perform his menial duties and play the piano; but woe betide anyone from the Guvnor downwards who tried to order him about or jolly him along.

Ada was the only exception, Irish Ada, who came in to oblige whenever the pub was busy and preferred then to serve only the customers in the best bars. Joe would mend anything for Ada. His love for her was solemn and sweet. No amount of chaff could ruffle the calm, unambitious worship with which he placed her upon a pedestal; nor for that matter could it affect the respect with which Irish Ada treated him.

They made a laughable pair: Joe, heavy, bald, unsmiling, inept but for his hands; Ada, an overblown dream of beauty, with the black hair and the petal-blue eyes of the the west of Ireland, the vivacity of Dublin, the veneer of Camden Town. Regarded

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as a couple, as I say, they were laughable in their ill assortment, in their inarticulate communication with one another. Yet there was something that Irish Ada as well as Joe took seriously. Any facetious comment about Joe, his piano-playing, the courtliness of his behaviour towards herself, or even his efficiency at the sink, would be met by a stony peasant glare from those blue Galway eyes, and the grating, town-tamed voice with its Hollywood-corrupted sophistication: "Now, quit kidding, brother . . ."

It was Ada, I imagine, who first knew about Joe's fingers going dead on him. She mentioned it to me in a roundabout way soon after they had the piano turned round so that you could not see Joe playing but could still put down a drink on the top of it when you called for a request item.

"Joe's fixed up a kind of pianola attachment to give himself a rest when his hands go funny. When you was joking one day, you said you'd got an old pianola at the back of your garage . . ."

"Only bits and pieces, but Joe's welcome to anything." Joe had just been fixing up an electric razor for me. "What's wrong with his hands?" I asked Ada.

"Some sort of cramp he gets after he's been playing for a bit—but that's for your ears and nobody else's. Customers like to hear the same pieces over and over again, and the Guvnor don't mind Joe switching over to the automatic—Guv says they used to call it 'George' in the Air Force."

"That's right," I said. "George was the automatic pilot. I'll have a word with Joe and tell him to take what he wants."

"I'll tell him, if it's all the same to you," said Irish Ada. "He goes right off the deep, he does, if he thinks anybody's finding out about the cramp in his hands. I reckon myself it's the washing-up that's done it."

Yet Joe stuck to the washing-up and, just as doggedly, though sometimes with a new twitch about the mouth in his grey moon-light face, to the playing of the bar piano. His performances were held in high esteem in that part of Camden Town. The pub customers liked to show off Joe as one of the attractions of the place.

They liked familiar music played loud, fast, and with a flourish of dexterity. They liked their favourites in a familiar order, only occasionally interspersed with request items, with classical pieces and with topical numbers celebrating special occasions, such as *Happy Birthday to You*, *Jingle Bells* at Christmas, *Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road* for bank holidays, or for matrimony a swung version of Mendelssohn's March.

Joe sorted out the pianola parts he needed from my garage and fixed them up in the cavernous beery depths of the pub piano.

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The trouble about his hands was a secret I shared with Ada and the Guvnor. They both assured me that Joe himself would tolerate no interference.

The cramp he suffered was sometimes like a paralysis. It could be ascribed to old age, or to the long sessions of washing-up, or even to prolonged pounding on the ivories which in the daylight looked like dirty teeth. No part of his humble routine was Joe prepared to give up, however, and this naturally suited the Guvnor. Ada herself never at any time suggested that Joe should now begin to take things easy. She was enough of a realist not to question that the glasses had to be washed, the piano had to be played, the customers had to be satisfied.

If anybody was not up to meeting the simple conditions that were the philosophy of the Guvnor and the rule of the trade, it was just " too bad." That brusque phrase meant the sack. But the Guvnor, who was a good-hearted type, never cared to speak of people getting the sack.

He entered with gusto into the small conspiracy about the pianola attachment to the piano in the bar. It was a clever contraption, a cunning gadget that tickled his fancy because of his war service in the Air Force. With a knowing wink, he liked to declare that " Joe has just gone over to George. And look at the customers! they're such beer-happy clots they don't know what they're getting."

Behind the upright piano draped with orange cretonne and Union Jacks, Joe went through the motions of playing the old favourites, beginning with *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, and working up to *Who's Your Lady Friend?* His arms worked but his fingers rested. From time to time he would really play a request item, a piece of classical stuff, or a special for birthdays or weddings. He was proud of the gadget, but the only evidence he gave of this was an occasional wink in my direction.

Irish Ada was more forthcoming. " I reckon that's saved his bacon," she said. " That's added years to his life. He just lives for his music."

He never told her, and certainly nobody else did, that Ivory Joe, the one-time engineer August Zoob, lived for her and nothing else. It was so obvious that nobody ever thought of mentioning it. It was so obvious, I suppose, that she herself came to accept it as part of the rich texture of life in Camden Town. The trains pounding through to Euston, the distant croak of the sea lions in the London Zoo, the blue hills of Hampstead to the north, the harsh bellow of the market round the corner, the long exhausted evenings, veiled with sooty sun or with rain—all this life Ada accepted with placid, greedy satisfaction

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Between coming into the pub to oblige, she made a good living at casual jobs, most of which were respectable enough, also at more or less casual encounters which were much less respectable. She had a room of her own, a crowded wardrobe of cheap clothes, plenty of heavy food, enough—often more than enough—to drink. She had travelled a long way from the general store in Galway. Of all that family of nine, she was the only one to fulfil the ambition of setting up like a fairy princess in the midst of the unimaginable splendours of London.

Life had nothing more to offer, and the silent worship of Ivory Joe was just an agreeable contribution to that successful existence. To some she might appear to live somewhat meanly, for she was the kind who never missed a trick. Nevertheless, a placid maternal benevolence lurked beneath the taut knitwear of the sweaters with which she usually preferred to cover her ample bust. It was a generosity that welled up impartially towards children, animals, customers in distress, casual acquaintances who visited her room, and, above all, towards Ivory Joe.

That muted generosity was her return for his love, which was only articulate when he played selections of Irish melodies specially for her. These could, in fact, be performed by the pianola attachment, but, however bad his fingers became—and they never got any better—he would always play this part of his repertoire himself.

At one time, before the piano was turned round, they might exchange glances of mutual acknowledgment, but latterly the heavy, preoccupied features of Ivory Joe beneath his bald dome had been concealed by the orange cretonne, the flags, and the row of dusty ferns which had been a brainwave of the Guvnor's.

It was when the heat-wave struck Camden Town, and the hills of Hampstead went pale violet, and those who never left the town took on a pale raddled look, that Irish Ada, studying herself painstakingly in the mirror before going on duty, decided upon subtle changes in the fullness of her life.

She had gained substance, but there was security to consider. A heat-wave could put years on people. She had many good years to go.

It suddenly struck her during that indolent sunny afternoon with the angry roar of the traffic outside, that even for her there could be pale raddled years ahead.

She acted, as usual, in a severely practical way. She might look like an Irish colleen, with her heart in the right place, but her long journey to success had equipped her with austere objectivity. She sat there amid mountains of cheap, well-cared-for clothes and made up her mind to marry the widower who had a

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good steady job on the railway at Euston and a whole house of his own with the upstairs rooms let off.

" Of course we shall be able to get dear old Ivory Joe to play something special for the spree we have in here afterwards," she said, when she broke the news to the Guvnor and myself.

The Guvnor was enthusiastic. The widower was a steady customer, captained the darts team, and was a good catch for any woman. Ada, he had been thinking for a long time, ought to settle down to something regular.

It was, in fact, a special event for the pub, in which everybody felt entitled to participate, more especially as Irish Ada had no relatives this side of Galway and the widower possessed only a truculent daughter who had joined the Communist Party and denounced the lucrative letting of rooms as capitalist exploitation.

Ivory Joe made no comment when it was arranged that the marriage ceremony should take place on the day after the public holiday. It meant an extra-special performance for the spree that night when normally the pub would have been quiet and he would have taken the evening off until the time came for the washing-up—but nobody expected him to worry about that.

Coming in the midst of the heat-wave, the public holiday was tough for everybody concerned. The widower was working overtime at Euston. Irish Ada was so busy in the bar that she had no time to consume the free drinks that were pressed on her. Ivory Joe played in the morning as well as the evening, and the top of the piano was crowded all over with drinks planted among the ferns by his grateful audiences. For a good many customers there was an air of anticipation about the holiday, and on the day of the marriage itself all the neighbours turned up in strength.

The ceremony was late in the afternoon and the Guvnor pushed the boat out at the reception in the pub afterwards. By the time the pub was open and everybody could pay for their own drinks, the atmosphere was quite as lively as any public holiday.

Joe had been round to my place to see if he could pick up some more spare parts for the pianola early in the afternoon. By the time I got there and had a word with him, he was already pounding away at the old favourites. There was a fixed grin on his face which was not the bemused look of satisfaction that most people were so sure he was wearing, but a painful, contorted effort that I, for one, hoped Irish Ada would not happen to notice.

The evening went with a bang. There were many toasts. There was a comic darts match, for which the widower and Irish Ada picked the sides. From Ivory Joe's corner, the music was loud and incessant. If somebody bawled out, " What about the

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Wedding March?"—sure enough, the Wedding March would come. Ada herself made no requests, but several times somebody would call for the Irish melodies, and they would be played, too.

During those hilarious hours, Ada ignored Ivory Joe. The long look he had given her when he first went across to the piano was something that even she could not answer. The look, in fact, had frightened her, and she went out of her way to forget it.

Joe might have been a machine pouring the stuff out. Only Ada, the Guvnor, and I knew that he probably was on the machine most of the time. For that reason, perhaps, the Guvnor said to me, "I reckon we ought to ask Ivory Joe for something very special before we close. He's in wonderful form, even if he's been on George most of the time. What about hopping over and asking him for something special?"

I pushed my way round among the potted ferns in the angle of the corner to get at Joe. He took no notice of my approach. The Irish melodies were very loud. I was taken aback when I saw that he was not playing them himself.

With his chin jutting downward onto his chest, with his bald head like a reflected moon, sallow and still in the tobacco-blue light, he took no notice of me and did not look up. Yet when someone from behind me shouted, "Give us the Scots stuff, Joe," the music changed, with a few lush introductory chords, into . . . *By yon Bonny Banks.*

He did not look up. His hands were clasped in front of him, in a tense imitation of prayer. "Ivory Joe!" I shouted, "how are you doing, chum? Ivory Joe!"

He did not look up.

He was dead. But how long had he been dead? The hands did not come apart when I tugged them. From the war, I knew enough of death to see that Ivory Joe had not just died. But the music was still going on and in a few minutes the Guvnor would call closing-time.

I backed out into the crowded room, leaving him in his rigid repose.

My first thought was to keep Ada away; but she and the rest of them were at the far end of the bar doing *Knees up, Mother Brown*, to the Scottish music that churned out from in front of the corpse of Ivory Joe.

"We'll have to switch the thing off and then get them all out before they notice," the Guvnor said.

He hurried across with me, and then, as he pushed his way round the piano, he added, "You play *Auld Lang Syne* yourself."

"But it's like this—" I began for the third time

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" There's no need to go to pieces just because of a corpse. You and I've seen bags of them. Just push his feet off the pedal and dump him down while you play *Auld Lang Syne* for the customers."

I am not squeamish, but there was something at this moment that I had to tell the Guvnor. Something that was prickling my spine, paralysing my nerves—and it was not just the sight of the long-dead body of Ivory Joe.

" Guvnor, I've got to tell you—" I began again.

" Come on, shift him. We've got to have *Auld Lang Syne*."

As the Guvnor slewed Ivory Joe round in the chair and the feet in the cheap polished shoes slipped away from the pedals, I reached out to help. " Leave him to me," grunted the Guvnor. " Now sit down and play . . ."

Before I reached the chair, there came a flourish of introductory chords and then, with tinkling solemnity, the melody of *Auld Lang Syne*. The customers formed themselves up, roaring and stamping. In front of the keyboard stood the empty chair, with Ivory Joe hunched up beside it.

The Guvnor stood up. " You'd better switch this thing off," he said, " while I get them all out through the other door. We can tell them Ivory Joe's had a crack-up."

" But, Guvnor," I managed to say at last, " there's nothing to switch off. It broke down over the holiday. He tried to collect some spare parts from me but they didn't work. The pianola pedal isn't even on."

We backed out hastily, both of us. *Auld Lang Syne* came to an end as we turned out the lights at that end of the bar. Then, as Irish Ada, the widower, and the rest of the customers formed up into a reeling procession, which we shepherded in front of us towards the main doors, the Wedding March of Mendelssohn thumped out from the darkness behind us.

★ ★ ★

FREE FOR ALL

Item, no Scholar being at School wear any dagger, hanger, or other weapon invasive, nor bring into the School, staff or bat, except their meat knife: *Item*, that no Scholar there make any affray within the same School upon the Master, the Usher, or upon any other Scholar of the same School, upon pain of leaving off his said School by one month,—And if any Scholar there make two frays as above is said, then to leave the same School by the space of two months,—And if any make the third, he to be banished the same School for ever without any favour.

Statutes of the Manchester Free Grammar School, 1515

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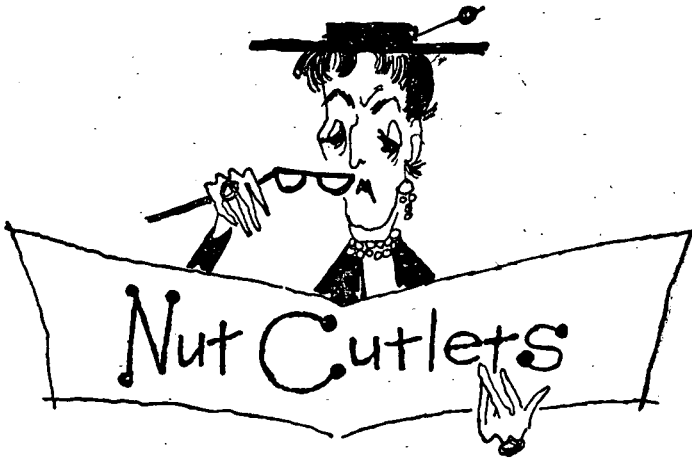

Don't be cruel
To a vegetabuel,
Remember a lettuce has a heart . . .

Music Hall Song

O cool in the summer is salad,
And warm in the winter is love;
And a poet shall sing you a ballad
Delicious thereon and thereof.

Take endive—like love it is bitter,
Take beet—for like love it is red!
Crisp leaf of the lettuce shall glitter,
And cress from the rivulet's bed:
Anchovies, foam-born, like the lady
Whose beauty has maddened this bard:
And olives, from groves that are shady;
And eggs—boil 'em hard.

MORTIMER COLLINS, *Salad*

Prunes or Prisms

At last the engine gave a jerk, the knives and forks slid sideways and sang against one another sadly, the cups said " cheap, cheap," to the saucers, as well they might, the door swung open, and the attendants came in crying " Porridge or Prunes, sir? Porridge or Prunes? " Breakfast had begun.

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That cry still rings in my memory. It is an epitome—not, indeed, of English food, but of the forces which drag it into the dirt. It voices the true spirit of gastronomic joylessness. Porridge fills the Englishman up, prunes clear him out, so their functions are opposed. But their spirit is the same: they eschew pleasure and consider delicacy immoral. That morning they looked as like one another as they could. Everything was grey. The porridge was in pallid grey lumps, the prunes swam in grey juice like the wrinkled skulls of old men, grey mist pressed against the grey windows.

E. M. FORSTER, *Porridge or Prunes, Sir?*

Alcohological

I am silent in the Club,
I am silent in the pub,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien:
For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a Vegetarian.

No more the milk of cows
Shall pollute my private house
Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian:
I will stick to port and sherry,
For they are so very, very,
So very, very, very Vegetarian.

G. K. CHESTERTON, *The Logical Vegetarian*

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Food For Thought

. . . Clovis approached the supper-table, in the blessed expectancy of one who has dined sketchily and long ago.

" I'm starving," he announced, making an effort to sit down gracefully and read the menu at the same time.

" So I gathered," said his host, "from the fact that you were nearly punctual. I ought to have told you that I'm a Food Reformer. I've ordered two bowls of bread-and-milk and some health biscuits. I hope you don't mind."

Clovis pretended afterwards that he didn't go white above the collar-line for the fraction of a second. " All the same," he said, " you ought not to joke about such things. There really are such people. I've known people who've met them . . ."

" SAKI," *The Match-Maker*

Cold Cheer

'Tis not that Janet's false, father,
'Tis not that she's unkind;
Tho' busy flatterers swarm around,
I know her constant mind.
'Tis not her *coldness, father,*
That chills my labouring breast,
It's that confounded cucumber
I've eat and can't digest.

R. H. BARHAM, *Ingoldsby Legends*

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WINDFALL

What a day! Exhilarating, exciting full of surprises

by MARTIN ARMSTRONG

WITH his raincoat collar turned up, hands in pockets and rucksack on his back, Mark pushed his uphill way along the lane against the tearing headwind. Jostling crowds of leaves hustled past his feet and rose in a sudden whirlpool as if to stop his progress and drive him back on his tracks. A large wet one hit him smack on the left cheek and stuck there till a gust snatched it away, and a few paces farther on, a snapped branch, a thing three inches thick and a yard long, enough to stun a chap, crashed down on the road just ahead of him.

He had been lucky on his holiday. You can hardly count on fine weather in October, but the five days of his walk had been sunny and warm and every tree and bush a blaze of yellows or scarlets or tawny browns, and even today was enjoyable. The tearing gale and the occasional bursts of whirling drizzle were exhilarating, exciting, full of surprises. The whole world seemed electrified by the gale.

He was making for the coast. Quite soon now, his map showed, the lane would strike the road which dived steeply down into the little seaside town. He was to stay the night, the last night of his holiday, with his sister Susan, eight years older than himself, who had married and come to live here six months ago, and he wished now that he wasn't.

Not that he wasn't fond of Susan. She was all right, even though she could never remember that he was no longer a schoolboy. But now there was Peter too, that large, red-faced chap of thirty-five, full of a condescending joviality to which it was extremely difficult to respond.

With a sudden pang he realized that his holiday, his real holiday, was on the point of ending.

At the top of the rise, where the lane joined the road, an astonishing view opened before him, a huge hollow of sky and sea, the sky packed with rolling clouds, the sea a boiling expanse of leaden grey and chalky white, and almost under his feet the

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huddled roofs and streets of the small town whose two stone jetties reached out curving arms to enclose the little harbour where fishing-boats swung at their moorings, each mast wagging like the needle of a speedometer.

The road narrowed and dived steeply downhill, on its left a continuous row of houses, on its right gardens with larger houses half hidden among trees. About halfway down, Susan had told him, he would find a green gate with Hillcroft painted on it. But he was so thrilled by the whirling and hissing of the trees and shrubs in the gardens and the frantically boiling sea below that as he approached the green gate, he felt an irresistible urge to go down first to the harbour and walk out along one of the jetties.

It was only a quarter past three; he had plenty of time, and there would be no need to mention, when he reached Hillcroft, that he had already done a little exploring. And so he marched straight past the gate without so much as a pause.

The street was deserted except for a black retriever that sailed briskly uphill towards him, running slightly sideways with its tail steering it like a rudder. As it passed him a gust drove it against his left leg, almost upsetting him, and he turned to scold it just in time to meet its reproachful backward glance. And then a hat, a man's hat, swooped at him across the road, soared suddenly high into the air, and dived into the Hillcroft garden, and he noticed in the doorway of a house opposite a dignified but hatless gentleman wearing tan gloves, a greatcoat, and a look of angry astonishment.

By now he had almost reached the bottom of the slope, and roofs and walls had nearly hidden the harbour. All he could see of it now was a short section of the western jetty. The roaring and hissing of the wind in his ears suddenly ceased and he saw that the gardens had given place to a row of houses, here and there among them a shop. He stopped at a tobacconist's to buy some cigarettes. Two women were waiting to be served while an old gentleman slowly tried to make up his mind which of three pipes he liked best. Mark studied a showcase and listened in to the two women's talk.

"I doubt if they'll ever marry. They're always quarrelling."

"Always?"

"Well, not always of course, but half the time."

"Oh well, lovers' quarrels."

"Something more than that. Incompatibility of temperament, I call it."

The old man had chosen at last and the women moved to the counter.

As he stepped out from the lull of the street onto the harbour

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front he was snatched into the full riot of the gale and had to lean back suddenly to prevent his raincoat driving him like a sail against a house wall. Dead leaves and litter of all sorts swirled round his feet and a muddy sheet of newspaper rose and attacked him like a great bird. A tall, gaunt old lady, crossly struggling to preserve her dignity, swept towards him, struck him a violent blow on the knee with a heavy shopping-basket, and shouted in his ear, "Look where you're going, young man."

"So I do," he shouted back, "but I can't go where I look." Dear me, that was rather rude and he added, "I . . . I hope I . . ." but another gust swept the old lady and his apology out of sight and hearing.

Other noises punctuated the noise of the gale; the heavy thud, like slow regular gunfire, when a wave struck the jetty wall, and then the explosion of water and spray rocketing over the jetty and clattering like a shower of gravel on the swinging surface of the harbour water.

The jetty was built in two stages. From the upper stage you looked out over the parapet into the gale and the open sea. Eight feet below it, on the harbour side, the lower stage, connected with the upper here and there by a flight of steps, followed the curve of the basin with at least some shelter from the gale. But Mark wanted no shelter: there would be shelter enough in Hillcroft, and he climbed the steps to the upper stage.

There it seemed that the gale was resolved to sweep him clean over the lower stage into the basin, and he was forced sometimes to stop and hold on to the parapet with both hands, facing wind and sea with the scarlet face, staring eyes, and erect hair of a jack-in-the-box. So, by slow degrees, he reached the seaward end of the jetty. Opposite him, on the end of the other jetty, stood a lighthouse, and through the narrow channel between, the sea came rollicking into the little harbour.

Midway on his return journey a sudden squall burst upon him and he retreated down the nearest steps to the lower stage. There he found a recess like an ingle-nook in the jetty wall and there he took refuge while the squall misted the swinging harbour water to half an acre of frosted glass.

Suddenly a human shape blew round the corner of the shelter and flung itself at him. Next moment they had collided, its hands struck his chest like a couple of buffers and, before he had time to think, his arms had closed round it.

A laughing, panting female voice spoke loudly into his right ear. "I'm awfully sorry."

"I'm not!" he laughed back, and he turned his head and, before he knew what he was doing, kissed a warm, wet cheek.

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She laughed again and, to his astonishment, gave him a hearty kiss in return. What a day! What madness! He slid his hands to her shoulders and pushed her gently back so as to get a look at her face. Goodness! what an entrancingly pretty creature—brown eyes, dark dishevelled hair, and cheeks glowing and shining with the wind and rain.

But in a moment her face changed: her eyes grew half frightened, half angry. "Leave go!" she said. "Let me go!"

He held on, grinning at her.

"Let me go, I tell you!" This time her voice was really angry. He dropped his hands and she turned and ran out of the shelter.

He stood there breathless, alone, too excited, too bewildered to move. Then he darted to the entrance and stared down the jetty. Except for a man far ahead of her, who a moment later vanished down the steps, the jetty was deserted, and he stood watching her running, head down, through the gusts and flying spray, a small, tottering, diminishing figure, till she too vanished down the steps into the town.

He returned to the shelter, slowly got out a cigarette and lit it. He was glowing, tingling, from head to foot. Whataday! One surprise after another, as if the whole world had gone mad. And this to crown all.

What on earth had possessed him? It was quite unlike him to behave like that. He had always been ridiculously timid with girls. Besides, he couldn't have been sure, when he kissed her, that she was a girl. She might have turned out to be some awful old woman. And she had kissed him back. What made her do that, if she was going to be so ratty the moment after? Yes, it seemed as if the gale had sent everything and everybody stark staring mad.

The squall had blown over by the time he had finished his cigarette and he chucked the end into the basin and started for Hillcroft. Hillcroft no longer had any terrors for him. What did Susan matter now? What did even Peter matter, now that he had this thrilling secret to wonder about, dream about, turn over and over in his mind?

During the night the storm died down. Next morning was calm and sunny, and he and Susan walked down to the harbour to see the fishing-boats go out. How different the place looked from yesterday, full of colour and sunshine and shadow and the coming-and-going of men, women, kids and dogs of all shapes and sizes.

He suggested that they should walk to the end of the other jetty and they climbed the steps to the upper stage. When they

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reached the top a young man and a girl, arm-in-arm, were coming towards them. They seemed to be arguing, he insisting, she angrily denying, and as they came level, the girl glanced at him and Susan. His heart stood still and the blood rushed to his face.

But as her eyes met his their idle inquisitiveness turned to a cold, unflinching stare, and instantly his confusion vanished and he stared back at her coldly, vacantly. Next moment the pair were behind him and Susan.

Thank goodness! He stifled a deep sigh of relief. For if she had smiled and perhaps nodded . . . Once again the blood rushed to his cheeks as he thought of Susan's incredulous amusement: "Well, upon my word, Mark, you *are* coming on. And who, if I may ask . . .?" Ugh! And of course she would have blurted the whole thing out to Peter at lunch and Peter would have been ponderously jocular. He shuddered at the mere thought. It would have ruined the whole thing for him.

As it was, it grew, took on new lights, new sensations, as he dreamt it over and over on his journey back to London that afternoon, from the first breathtaking collision and the astonishing and gratifying way he had risen to the occasion, to their meeting on the jetty this morning. That silly ass she was with, and Susan too . . . how little either suspected their secret, and how artfully they had preserved it. That cold stare they had exchanged . . . it seemed to him now exquisitely comical: he almost laughed out loud as he pictured it.

Yes, a glorious holiday and no mistake, blossoming at the end into that tearing gale which for a few hours had sent the whole world mad with whirling leaves, bursting waves, and sudden bewildering kisses.

★ ★ ★

HANSARD IS AS HANSARD DOES

A collection of bricks dropped by French deputies in the last Parliament and printed in a book by M. François Muselier contains the following: "With the growing consumption of horse-meat a new future is opened for the equine race,"—"A violent crisis, this time mortal, ensued, but without serious consequences," and "To protect pork is to protect ourselves."

M. Muselier also quotes the following from a speech in the Assembly: "We are among those who think that France needs more children, but the increase must be made in legitimate families and by legitimate families. Does this mean that nothing can be done in other directions? We think not." A French writer described this as "involuntary cynicism."

Manchester Guardian

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BE SHOT FOR SIXPENCE

by MICHAEL GILBERT

" Attention, Philip . . . " As soon as I spotted the announcement in the personal column, I knew it was a danger signal meant for me—and for me only. The signature pointed unmistakably to my old school friend Colin Studd-Thompson, now officially a member of the Diplomatic, but in fact employed by Intelligence on top-secret missions inside the troubled perimeter of Europe. Only as a last resort would Colin have devised this method of putting out a discreet distress signal: " If you want the inner story, go and see Henry."

Now Henry was a woman—our redoubtable old governess (known as Henry because she was the eighth).

Acting on Henry's laconic instructions—but still in the dark about the whole business, except its gravity for Colin—I managed to make my way to Schloss Obersteinbrückl, a castle high up in the Austrian mountains from which Colin had disappeared three weeks ago. Here I discovered the enigmatic Ferenc Lady and his staff ostensibly engaged in " ethnographical research " but from the proximity of the Hungarian border I knew far more crucial matters were afoot. I sought out Major Messelen in hope of a clue.

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On the fringe of the Iron Curtain we were at action stations—why?

"I'M sorry to intrude," I said, in my best German.

Behind the table sat Messelen, a man of about forty. He had light hair cut very short, light eyes, a short nose that started in one direction and finished in another, and that sort of general appearance of having been smoothed off on an emery-wheel which will be for ever associated with General Rommel. Even in shirt-sleeves his late profession sat squarely on his shoulders.

His face lit up. "Another Englishman!"

"Since you say another, there is a possibility that you knew a friend of mine. Herr Studd-Thompson."

"I know Mr. Thompson, yes. Mr. Colin—Studd—Thompson." He pronounced each word with relish. "A most friendly and agreeable character. A friend of yours, you say?"

"A very old friend. I have come here to find him. That is where I hoped you might be able to help me."

"Alas, no. I have not seen Mr. Thompson for—oh—more than three weeks."

"But I understand that you used to see quite a lot of him?"

"That is true, Mr.—?"

I told him my name, but without much hope. He tried it in three different ways and then gave it up.

"Call me Philip," I said, "and tell me . . ."

Suddenly, near at hand, outside the open windows, where sun

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streamed in, gleaming on the brass wire of five or six bird-cages, the great clock of the Mariankirche in Steinbrückl began to speak for the hour. First came a triple four-note introduction. Then the great bell chimed twice. In the silence that followed I heard all Messelen's song-birds trying to outsing their great brass rival.

"Absurd, is it not?" said Messelen. "I had a cock bird once who broke his heart trying to drown the big bell at midday. You were saying?" I wasn't really saying anything. I was casting about wildly for an opening in our conversation—a lead to some kind of information about Colin.

"I was told that you knew Colin well," I began. "It occurred to me to hope—"

"We had tastes in common," said Messelen. "That was all." He moved to his feet with a sort of smoothness I should have expected from a man half his age, and opened a wall cupboard. Three of the shelves were piled with albums. He smoothed his fingers across them, pulled one out, and laid it on the table. "South American issues," he said. "Some of them very rare."

"I'm afraid I know nothing about them," I said.

"No? Your friend was knowledgeable."

That I could believe. The ever-widening circle of Colin's knowledge could have embraced philately as easily as it had engulfed Esperanto.

"Were stamps the *only* thing you used to talk about?" I said.

"We liked stamps," Messelen conceded, "and we enjoyed the pizzup."

"The—?" He made the gesture of one lifting a tankard to his lips. Enlightenment came. "Well," I said, "I'm not what you'd call a violent drinker, but if you'd fancy a couple this evening I'd be very glad to join you."

"At the Pleasure Island, then, at eight o'clock."

At eight o'clock exactly I entered Pleasure Island. It was a curious place; about an acre in extent and roughly the shape of an aircraft carrier. It had, apparently, been laid out by a committee of discrepant tastes. It contained, in no particular sort of order, a beergarden, an aquarium, a reading-room, an open-air orchestra stand, a swimming-bath, and a section labelled "Circus and Side-shows." I have no doubt that in the heyday of Steinbrückl the whole Island blazed with lights and swarmed with pleasure-seekers, but at that particular moment retrenchment was the order of the day and only the beergarden was really in action.

Messelen had a beer ready for me; with a small schnapps as a chaser.

I have not concealed the fact that I had liked Messelen at sight. After a couple of beers I found no reason to like him less. We talked about the war. Messelen held the detached, professional views of most German officers I have met. He had been in Norway and Russia before he reached North Africa, and it was evident that he knew what he was talking about.

I asked him what he was doing now.

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"I exist," he said. "I am agent here for Kontour." I knew the name. They are a big firm that specializes in harvesting-machinery. It was warm work thinking out technicalities in a foreign language, and we put back quite a bit of beer between us.

The orchestra, I was rather surprised to see, had worked through to Item 10—an imitation of a thunderstorm in the Harz Mountains. We must have been there longer than I thought. I looked at my watch and saw it was already nearly eleven o'clock.

Messelen leaned forward and said something. It coincided with the best efforts of the tympanist and I lost it. He said it again.

"Where?" I said.

"In the corner. No, to the right of the bandstand. With the fat man. A blonde."

The place seemed full of fat men with blondes. Suddenly I saw her.

"The big blonde."

"The one drinking beer?"

"That's right."

"What about her?"

"Only that I once saw Herr Studd-Thompson here with her."

With a final crash the orchestra achieved its consummation. The last peals of thunder died away across the mountaintops. The Nibelungen stabled their horses and hung their armour back on the wall. In the comparative silence I tried to order my thoughts.

I said, "But that's Mitzi—Major Piper's secretary."

"That is so. Also she sleeps with him."

I said, "Last time I saw them they were sleeping apart," but it went over his head.

"And you say that Colin used to—"

"I do not say that he slept with her."

"No. But you say that he came here with her."

"Once. Maybe more often. I do not think it was a secret."

I agreed that coming to Pleasure Island together would be an odd way of keeping a secret. The place was now absolutely jam-packed with people. The orchestra was strapping away its instruments into wicker and canvas containers, and loud-speakers had started to give out bouncy jazz from a South German station.

Once I had assimilated the idea that the fastidious Colin should be seen about in public with a girl like Mitzi, a possible explanation occurred to me. Whatever Colin was doing he was, presumably, more or less in liaison with Major Piper. Rather than hang around him and his office he might have preferred to keep contact through Mitzi.

A waiter squeezed his way through to us with two more beers. As I paid him Messelen said, "You see the man with her now?"

"The surly character with a bow-tie?"

"Yes. His name is Wachs. He is a bad hat. A racketeer."

"You have rackets here, too?"

"Here above all."

"What sort of rackets?"

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"Well—there is a lot of traffic over the frontiers, you understand."

"Through the impenetrable Iron Curtain?"

"Of course. The Russians know about it, and control most of it. It is as useful to them as to—anyone else."

"And Wachs is in it?"

"He is what you would call a minor character."

"Even so," I said, "it's damned odd that he should be hanging round with the secretary to the British Consular Agent. I think this calls for action."

Messelen looked up. "What do you propose to do?"

"For a start," I said, "we could follow them when they leave here."

"I do not advise it."

"There's no need for you to come."

It is one of my peculiarities that even whilst I am doing something silly the other half of me is able to stand back and criticize. For instance, I could see now that I was partly drunk; that Messelen was not as drunk as I was—or had a better head—and that he seemed to be weighing up whether I was going to make a fool of myself, and, if so, whether he ought to cut adrift now or tag along and see that I didn't get into too much trouble.

"They're off," I said. Mitzi and her escort were fighting their way through the crowd.

As he came past our table I took a good look at Wachs. He was a heavy man with that expression of fixed ill-temper that derives either from childhood repressions or permanent stomach troubles. He was pushing through the other drinkers with about as much finesse as a rhinoceros making his way through the crowd at a drinking-pool. And he was steering Mitzi ahead of him, more as a battering-ram than a gesture of courtesy. He looked a thoroughly ugly customer.

I gave him ten yards and then followed. Messelen came along with me.

It was all right on the Island. There were plenty of people about. As soon as we got into Steinbrückl it was different. One or two couples were strolling back into the town, but they were at long intervals. Without Messelen I should either have lost my quarry or made my pursuit obvious in the first hundred yards. Messelen seemed to guess where they were making for, and his knowledge of the lay-out did the rest.

We dived down a side street, turned up a long back alley which was full of shadows and smells, stumbled up it, turned again, and began to move, more carefully now, up a flight of flat, cobbled steps. At the top we paused. Silence reigned. We peered out.

About ten yards up the road Wachs was standing, entwined with Mitzi. He was nibbling the back of her neck.

After a pause for digestion they moved on. We allowed them to turn the corner and sprinted after them. Since Messelen, too, was wearing rubber soles, we made very little noise.

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It was when we reached the corner that I realized, for the first time, exactly where we were. We were looking at the Schneidermeister wine store, and above it were the offices of Major Piper, H.M. Consular Agent. I had met the Major. He was a small spare man of about sixty, with a flattened nose and a broad, squashed face that gave him the look of one of those peculiar Tasmanian mammals whose name I can never remember.

His offices and the street were in complete darkness. Municipal lighting in Steinbrückl had got no farther than the main streets and squares. A black cavern, with a grey ceiling. I think the same thought was in both our minds: that Wachs and the insatiable Mitzi were tucked into one of the doorways having a second course. In which case to go along the street was to invite discovery.

I felt Messelen's hand on my arm; and then saw for myself. A light was moving in Major Piper's office. It looked like a torch. Then more light. Someone had turned on the desk light. A hand drew down the blind. "Cool," said Messelen in my ear, "to use the office for love-making whilst the boss is away."

We moved along the street until we were opposite the window. We could see nothing, not even a shadow on the blind.

"I don't believe it," I said.

"You think, perhaps, some funny business?"

"I'm damned sure of it," I said. "Why should they come all this way, at this time of night, for a little simple necking? She's presumably got a flat somewhere. So has he."

"What do you propose?"

The beer and the brandy were still in me. "Let's knock them up and see what transpires," I said.

"You and me and who else?" said Messelen. "That Wachs—I told you—he's a nasty character."

"So am I."

"If you go in, you go alone."

But I was wrong. Neither of us went in.

Lights had appeared at the top of the street. Headlights. As the car turned the corner we were caught by their bright and impersonal gaze. As if embarrassed by sighting us, the lights blinked and dipped, and then the car drew up beside us.

Major Piper looked out of the driving-seat. "Well," he said, "fancy finding you here. And how are you, Major?"

"I'm fine," said Messelen.

"Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

"Me," said Messelen, "I live two streets from here. I'm sure Philip would be pleased."

Major Piper had got out and he must have seen the light in his own office. There seemed to be nothing left for me to say except, "It's very good of you."

"Not at all," said Major Piper. "Not at all. I will take you back to your hosts at the Schloss Obersteinbrückl. Anything to oblige a compatriot."

Next morning I woke late, feeling bad. I got up, shaved, dressed,

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and wandered down. The place was as lively as a boarding-school in holiday-time.

I tugged on the bell rope and, when the bearded lady appeared, demanded black coffee. She seemed unsurprised. Schloss Obersteinbrückl was the sort of place where black coffee was drunk at all hours, I suspect.

Afterwards I annexed a rug from my bed, retired to the woods behind the castle, and slept some more.

I dreamt that I was playing water polo for England and came to the surface with a struggle to find my face being licked by a mastiff. Attached to the mastiff by a steel chain was Truë Kethely. She was laughing at me. "It was a shame to wake you," she said. "For you looked so sweet in your sleep."

"All right," I said, "you needn't tell me. Mouth open, and dribbling lightly."

"Certainly not. Your mouth was tightly compressed like a typical reticent Englishman."

"How did you find me here?"

"Lippi found you. He is an industrious tracker. We train him every day on offal."

"That makes it quite perfect," I said, sleepily. From where I lay she looked wonderful. She looked all right from almost any angle, but all the cameras in Hollywood would have sung together like the morning stars for joy if they could have caught her just at that moment, with one hand on the big dog's head and the rays of the dying sun making gold out of her hair.

"Truë," I said, "how old are you?"

"What a funny question to ask. Why do you wish to know?"

"I've no idea," I said. "It's just one of those things we always ask girls when we meet them in England."

"Ah yes. I know. In England, you have a law: you must not rape any girl until she is sixteen."

"It's time you went home," I said.

When we got back, Lady's assistant, Lisa Prinz, met us in the hall. She gave us a quick, sharp look, under those dark eyebrows, and said to Truë, "We have been looking for you."

"What has happened, Lisa?" said Truë.

"Lady has had to go to London. He caught the four o'clock train to Klagenfurt. From there he can fly."

"Curiously urgent," I said.

They both looked at me.

"The problems of ethnography, I mean," I explained. "Klagenfurt today. London tomorrow. Has Lady mislaid a valuable Croat, or stumbled on the missing Slovene link?"

Truë laughed. Lisa said rather sharply, "I do not inquire where he goes or why."

"That's the girl," I said. "You and the Light Brigade." I went up to change for dinner.

The more I saw of Schloss Obersteinbrückl the more did Colin's description seem just. It was a most peculiar sort of fairy palace.

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It came to life at dusk. Lights were kindled; fires sprang up in the grates; servants appeared. From then until dawn the whole place hummed with suppressed, self-satisfied life.

Dinner that evening proved rather good fun. Everyone was more themselves with Ferenc Lady away. And when I realized that, I realized a little of the grip he had on all these people.

When the wine—an excellent Hungarian Tokay—came round, I remembered what my host, the Baron Milo, a vital septuagenarian, had told me, and took a quick look at the young lady who was serving it. And I saw what he meant. She had black hair, sloe-black eyes, clear skin, and a pouting mouth; and everything else that God ever gave women.

The Baron called her something or other. It sounded like "Dim-Wits." She walked away from me with a petulant waggle, picking up a fairly hot glance from the Baron as she went by. His son, General Milo, gazed blandly at her through heavy, horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Yugoslav," said Lisa in my ear.

"If I was Tito," I said, "I should put her on a list of forbidden exports."

"I don't think she came through the customs."

I was still digesting this thought when the party broke up. Truë said something about filing and disappeared, like a good girl who works even when the boss isn't there, in the direction of the Headquarters office. Gheorge Ossudsky, a young man with a pale face and large sad eyes, who was Lady's personal assistant, went with her. The rest of us took our coffee into the small drawing-room.

"I understand," said the Baron, in careful English, "that all your great houses have now been turned into museums?"

"A lot of them have," I said. "Some of the best of them are used as schools for delinquent children."

The Baron then translated his own observation and my comment to the Baronin, a tightly corseted old lady with the face and bearing of Senior Treasury Counsel, who gave out a sharp cackle. The conversation continued in this way for some time until the Baronin dropped off to sleep. The Baron then refilled my glass and his own with brandy, and said, in a somewhat challenging voice, "You noticed Dmwitza then?"

"A striking girl," I said.

"The girls of northern Yugoslavia," said the Baron, speaking in the dispassionate voice proper to an ethnographer, "are constructed for love. They are all of the same mould. It is depth of body, you understand, that gives pleasure to love. They are as deep in body as—as they are shallow in wit. They have only one fault, to my mind. They are quite insatiable."

"Who are quite insatiable?" demanded the Baronin, waking up.

"We were discussing the English income-tax system, my dear."

"Ah, the English income-tax system," said the Baronin. She disposed herself for sleep again, but the interruption had thrown the Baron out of his stride. He turned to politics.

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" Here we are well placed," he said, " to watch the Soviet system in operation. We have, you might say, a dress-circle view of one of her most unmanageable satellites—Hungary."

" According to the newspapers, they seem to have a purge or a reshuffle every six months. I fancied, however, that they had been a little more stable recently."

" For the last year, yes. That is David Szormeny. He is a strong man. Too strong, perhaps." I tried to summon up my recollections of Szormeny. A few photographs had been allowed to filter across to the western world. I remembered one of him at a Farm-workers Congress. A tall man with an ugly, superficially pleasant face, who reminded me of someone—I couldn't place it—one of our own public characters, perhaps.

" There is danger," the Baron continued, " in inserting a steel component into a machine that is otherwise constructed entirely of soft iron."

" I see," I said thoughtfully. " And is there much unrest? "

" There was," said the Baron, " until Szormeny doubled the industrial workers' ration and gave them certain privileges."

At this point, to my annoyance, the Baronin fell out of her chair, and when we had picked her up and sorted her out the Baron decided that he had better take her off to bed.

It was after breakfast next morning that I happened to stroll along the terrace and turn into the conservatory on the south wall of the Schloss. It was narrow and dim and full of hanging baskets of feathery Cycas and Cyathea. As I picked my way along the duckboards on the floor I realized that it was more extensive than I had thought, opening out finally into a balloon-shaped annexe at the corner, where one of the long wicker chairs was occupied by the Baron; another, pulled up alongside it, by little Dim-wits. He seemed to be engaged in tickling the front of her bodice with a palm frond. How she was reacting to this I was unable to observe as she had her back to me.

Blessing once more my rubber-soled shoes, I withdrew carefully, the way I had come. I was almost back at the terrace when a complication presented itself. The door clicked open, and the Baronin appeared. She was moving slowly, but with the steady inevitability of a snail in a salad border; and I didn't really see how the Baron was going to get out of this one.

I backed nervously ahead of the Baronin. " A lovely collection you have here," I said loudly.

" It is excellent for palms and ferns." She prodded a dark green Cycas with her ivory-headed, rubber-tipped stick.

I backed a bit farther and resisted the impulse to look over my shoulder. " Do you grow orchids? " I said loudly.

" My husband is very fond of them," agreed the Baronin. " He has a weakness for tropical flowers."

The Baronin might be deafish but she was not blind nor, I felt certain, complaisant.

" You get a lovely view from here," I said desperately.

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"On a clear day," she said, "you can see the tip of the Radkersburg."

"Would that be north or south of the pass?" This held her for a moment. Like most women she had little idea of topography.

"Surely," I said, pointing over her shoulders the way we had come, "that is a flamarium orchid. I had no idea they could be grown in Europe—"

Once she was started in the other direction it wasn't so bad. It took ten minutes and three more leading questions to get her out on the terrace, and after that, feeling that I couldn't very well drop her, I went with her to examine her collection of Japanese potpourri bowls.

That afternoon I went for a proper walk. I felt the need of it. I made my way down to Steinbrückl, skirted the town to the left, went fast along the good road to Graz for about eight kilometres, then took the first track to the left. There was no chance of losing my way. The mountain crests to the south were ruled in one dark, hard line across the whole of my horizon. I was out for walking, not climbing, so I stopped when the track ran out of the forest onto the outcrop and swung east, skirting the edge of the trees. The tops above me looked stiff, but nowhere unclimbable.

I kept up a fair pace in and out of the gullies, and was back above Obersteinbrückl by four o'clock. When the old gnome in livery answered the bell he told me the Baron wanted me.

As I entered his study, the Baron got up, moved across, and shook me by the hand. Nothing more was said then or at any other time about the incidents of the morning; but I reckoned I had received the accolade.

The Baron said, "I have news for you."

"News?"

"Of a friend of yours."

"Of Colin?"

"A most estimable young man. His knowledge of the intricacies of Habsburg genealogy—quite remarkable."

"What have you heard?"

"It is, I fear, only at second hand. But it may offer you a lead. There is a man in Steinbrückl who does much work for me. Herr Schneidermeister—"

"I know him," I said. "A wine merchant, and shaped like a tub."

"So. He is a largely built man. But his sons are young and active. They travel the countryside. They have not, perhaps, an undue respect for the artificial demarcations of frontiers . . ." At any other time I should have enjoyed the courteous circumlocutions in which the Baron wrapped up the fact that he was hand in glove with a gang of smugglers. I remembered the Tokay from Hungary. At the moment, however, I was too anxious to play.

"Tell me, please, Herr Baron," I said. "Who has seen Colin and where?"

"It was young Franz Schneidermeister. He was talking to a

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man called Thugutt, a Yugoslav of German origin, quite an ethnological curiosity himself."

The Baron must have seen my face, because he hurried on: "He is a forester. A very useful man, who lives with his family on the Yugoslav side of the Austrian frontier line, in the mountains overlooking Hungary."

I could well imagine that a man so placed would be useful to the Baron, with his taste for smuggled wine and women.

"And he has seen Colin?"

"I understand so. Either seen him or spoken to someone who has seen him. It was not easy to discover which, because on this occasion Thugutt appeared unanxious to talk. In fact, he would say very little. It seemed to Franz, however, that he might have talked, perhaps, if face to face with a personal friend of Studd-Thompson."

"Would he talk to me?"

"That was in my mind."

"When can I see him?"

The Baron said, "On that we must consult Herr Lady. You realize that we must not do anything to upset his plans."

"I'm afraid I can't wait for Lady," I said. "If you don't help me, I shall have to see Schneidermeister and do what I can on my own."

The Baron looked distressed. "I beg you," he said, "to wait."

"Until he has finished buying his hand-sewn shirts or getting his hair cut in Bond Street, or whatever he has waltzed off to London for?"

An unaffected laugh brought my head round.

Lady was inside the door—a small, petulant man, whose sallow face might have been good-looking if he had not been so obviously irritated.

"In fact," he said, "I *did* have time for a haircut in Bond Street, but as you see, I have not allowed it to delay my return."

I said truculently, "I don't know how long you've been eavesdropping, but if you heard what I told the Baron, you know what I want—"

"I expect it is the same as we all want. Would you be good enough to come with me?"

I followed him into the operations room. Lisa and Truë were there, doing something to the maps.

Lady waggled his little finger at them and they disappeared. Then he looked up at me, and said, "You were the chief reason for my visit to London."

"Oh," I said, rather blankly. It was obvious enough, but it had not occurred to me. "What did they tell you?"

"Very little, except that you really were what you said—an old friend of Colin Studd-Thompson."

"Why should I have lied about it?"

"No reason why. No reason why not." He moulded the tip of a fresh cigarette between his thin brown fingers and added,

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" Also that, judging from your movements at the end of last week, you were a man of some resource. And that, so far as they knew anything at all about you, of integrity. In the circumstances— " having got the cigarette to his liking he squeezed it into his long amber holder—" they have left the matter to my discretion. And I have come to the conclusion that you should stay here and help us."

" Why? "

" Because I like you," said Lady, with a broad smile that might have meant anything. " And trust you, of course," he added.

" In other words, I'm here, and it might cause more trouble if you tried to sling me out. And anyway, whilst I'm here, you can keep an eye on me."

" My dear fellow," said Lady. " You insist on imputing the worst of motives to everyone. If I am to be candid with you, you must be candid with me."

" All right," I said. " Then you be candid first. What's it all about—you can leave out the ethnography."

Lady said, " Very well. You shall know." And he told me.

I won't try to reproduce it word for word as he said it, because he took some time telling the story and I can't remember all of his background stuff. But what it amounted to was this. The Western powers—America and England specifically—had established a series of teams to deal with the problems of each of the satellites. The *Equipe Lady* were the top Hungarian specialists. It was quite a large affair, with an office at The Hague and branches in London and New York. Analysing the press reports and monitoring the wireless were its bread-and-butter activities. But there were more specialized branches. One of these was concerned with screening all refugees from Hungary; screening them and, in very exceptional circumstances, sending them back again.

" We are not a military organization," said Lady, and looking him over, from his open-work shoes, via his shot-silk shirt to his amber cigarette-holder, I was forced to agree that he did not fit into my picture of any military headquarters. " Our role is to accumulate information. The larger part of it we get by sitting still and keeping our ear to the ground. Very occasionally, when there is an unexplained corner to be filled in or some little job to be done, a man goes over the mountains."

" But here, at Schloss Obersteinbrückl," I said, " you are far from your comfortable offices in The Hague. In fact, you are at action stations. Why? Is a man being sent over the mountains? "

Lady looked at me. " I can perceive," he said, " why you were unpopular with your own Intelligence."

" But I want to know."

" Yes, a man went over the mountains."

" Colin? "

Lady's laugh sounded spontaneous. " Of course not," he said. " Why should we send an Englishman, who would be known as an Englishman every time he opened his mouth, when we have a

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dozen home-grown Hungarians with families and backgrounds?"

"All right," I said. "Then what was Colin doing here?"

"He was our liaison."

"With whom?"

"With our sponsors, of course. With England and, through England, with America."

That seemed possible enough. "What has happened to Colin?"

"He disappeared," said Lady, "three weeks ago. He walked down to Steinbrückl one evening, and did not return."

"Who saw him last, and where?"

"He was seen at Pleasure Island, with Major Piper's secretary. According to her, he made an excuse to leave her, pushed off into the crowd, and did not come back."

"And you have done nothing about it?"

"We have done what we could. One of our best local men was put onto the job."

"Yes," I said bitterly. "And in a few months' time he will report in triplicate to the effect that he has left no stone unturned and no avenue unexplored."

"He will not report to anyone," said Lady. "He was picked out of the river three days ago, a mile below the town. It is not clear whether he died by drowning or not. The top of his head was missing."

I cannot remember what else was said. Lady did not appear at dinner, which was a silent meal, and after it I went up early to my room. I undressed, turned the light out, and sat for a long time in front of the window. I may even have dozed, for I have no idea what time it was when I opened my eyes and saw Truë.

There was a clear, silver moon, quite full and undimmed by the faintest mist. Truë had come out of the shrubbery at the foot of the long lawn. She looked like Titania in a belted raincoat. She walked slowly across the grass and I saw that there was no spring in her step. She had come either far or fast. I knew that she must be making for the little side door under the balcony; and that from there three flights of the back stairs would bring her out into the passage, a few paces from my bedroom.

On an impulse I got to my feet, opened my own door, and stepped out into the carpeted passage. It was only a minute before I heard her coming. If it had been longer my internal monitor would have told me I was behaving like a fool, and would have sent me back to bed.

Dragging feet scuffled the stair carpet. As she came past I put a hand out and touched her arm. She came round like a steel spring. Her hand went down and up again, and a thin point, blue in the moonlight, touched my pyjama jacket.

If you should be so unwise as to touch a sleeping scorpion, just so, on the touch, without the least intermission of time between sleeping and waking, the armoured tail swings round and is fastened to your finger.

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True dropped her hand and said rather breathlessly, "Philip! That was a silly thing to do." Then she was gone.

I stood watching her, a tiny, cold feeling still tingling on my skin like a drop of iced water. Up the passage a door opened. There was a whisper of voices. A door shut . . . The place was like a rabbit warren.

I woke up thinking about Truë. That was a warning, if I needed one. I didn't see her until the afternoon, and by the time she came down I saw that twelve hours' sleep had performed its customary service. Her eyes were clear and the spring was back in her step.

"Come out into the garden," she said, "and I will apologize for last night. If I had not been frightened and tired I would not have done it."

"I'd like to see you perform when you're fresh," I said. "My navel is still tingling."

"I am adept with a knife," admitted Truë. She spoke it in just the casual, self-deprecating way that an English girl might say, "I'm not too bad at tennis, really."

"Let us sit in this summer-house," I said. "It is designed for confidences. You tell me the story of your life and I'll tell you mine. And stop Tutti from breathing in my face."

"Is he not a monster?" She said something in colloquial Hungarian to the mastiff, who removed himself from my chest, grumbled unhappily, and laid himself down across the opening of the summer-house like a sunken tree across a dam.

"I was born," she said, "in Gyor."

"Of poor but honest parents."

"Not at all. They were very rich. We had a summer-house on Lake Balaton and a town house in the Margit Korut in Buda. In summer we lived at Badacsony on the lake, bathing and boating and—oh, having fun."

"It sounds lovely. Why did you stop?"

"First the Germans came. That was in 1944—just before Holy Week. They were very correct, but we did not like to stay in Buda. Besides, there might have been rationing."

"That, of course, would have been unspeakable. What did you do?"

"We went back to Badacsony. Then the Russians came."

"They were not correct?"

Truë looked at me to see whether I was joking. Then she laughed herself. But, all in all, it was not a convincing performance.

"Did your family escape?"

"No. They stayed too long."

"Do you know what happened to them?"

"Of course I know, they are dead. I had been sent to Sopron with Anna, one of our old servants. She came from Austria, and her plan was to get back there. That was why we chose Sopron. It was close to the frontier. I cannot remember a great deal about

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that. In the end we came to Graz, where Anna lived, and we stayed there."

"What did you do?"

"I went back to school, of course, and learnt history and geography. Now, that is enough about me. Tell me about you."

"Like you," I said, "I come of rich and dishonest parents. The only difference is that in England we make our rich men work. My father worked very hard indeed. He still does. I decided I would go in for the Law and I was called to the Bar. As I found no work at all, I had plenty of time to indulge in my hobbies."

"Which are?"

"Rock climbing and girls. You would be surprised how complementary the two pursuits are."

"I do not wish," said Truë, with dignity, "to hear about your sexual conquests. Be serious, and talk to me about the war. You had adventures in the war."

"How do you happen to know that?"

"Lisa told me. And so did Colin."

"Well," I said. "It's a long story . . ."

So it was. The odd, sealed chapter in my life. It had started on one Christmas Day and ended on another, and had lasted exactly three years.

I was a Calais prisoner and, after sampling the dubious joys of a succession of transit camps, by Christmas of 1940 I was on my way to Bolen, in Poland. My only friend was a Pole, a brave and delightful seventeen-year-old boy called Karol. With Karol I climbed out of the camp, in the spring of 1941, and walked right through to his home, a farm in southern Poland, near Wadowice. Here the desire to escape died on me; and I spent a very happy five or six months working in the fields by day, and in the evenings talking to Karol and his family, in my rapidly improving Polish.

I passed as one Stefan, a distant cousin, from Warsaw. This was all right for a time, and I even got some sort of identity documents out of the local authorities. The trouble, as usual, started with the neighbours. I was suddenly bundled into a cabin in the woods with a week's food and told to lie low. I lay up, safe but badly troubled, for a week, and then crept back at dusk to the farmhouse. It had been burnt out, and the farmer, his wife, and Karol nailed up outside it like jackdaws on a keeper's wall. There was nothing I could do about it. I set out through the forest for Czechoslovakia.

It was late summer, and because I did not at that moment greatly care whether I lived or died, I made that crossing safely and on my own. It was considered at that time by refugees and lawless folk to be one of the most closely guarded frontiers in Europe. Through that autumn I lived in a dozen different towns and cities and stayed with half a hundred people; people who have run together in my mind, and faded into one composite blur.

I passed now for a Danziger. My Polish was quite good enough for this. Although my moves were zigzag and haphazard, I found

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myself drifting to the south; and by November I was ready for my next move, which was into Hungary. It was a trip that took a lot of arranging, and in the end three of us set out, too late, and ran into snow conditions in the South Tatra Mountains that we were not equipped to deal with. The route we chose would have been easy enough for a well-equipped team but we had the wrong clothing and boots, one bad axe between us, and practically no rope. I was the only mountaineer in the party, and when I realized how things were, I insisted that we turn back. In the end the three of us sat down in a corrie, and argued it out. When the other two saw I was adamant, they drew guns and informed me, in the friendliest way, that if I would not take them over they must shoot me. That is one way of winning an argument. We went on.

I bore them no ill will. The Gestapo had their tickets, and it was worth any risk to them to get across. At least, I hope it was, because less than twenty-four hours later the rotten rope between us parted like a piece of string and they both fell four or five hundred feet onto the rocks. I reckon they slept more softly there than they would have done in one of Heydrich's prisons. I reached Hungary that evening, with bad frost-bite in both hands.

I managed to get to one of my " safe " addresses. It was a retired dentist, who lived with six dogs in a pepper-pot villa in the foothills. I stayed there for three months. My right hand got better, but my left hand worse. In the end a doctor came out and took off the top joint of the little finger. As soon as I was ready to move I started drifting south again.

At the time I crawled in over the northern frontier, Hungary was an artificial oasis of phoney peace. In a lot of ways it was much trickier for me than a country under occupation. There was no Resistance movement to help me. When I left the friendly dentist I drifted down to Buda and hitched up with the floating population of spivs, expatriates, and little criminals. The fact that I spoke Hungarian was a help. I made money by giving language lessons. By that time I was competent to teach in English, French, German, and Polish.

I told a complicated story, involving an American father, a German grandfather, and a Polish grandmother. It wasn't my story that kept me out of gaol. It was the fact that I kept on the move. When I couldn't find a bed, I slept in the open air. If I hadn't anything else to do by day, I went into one of Buda's many Turkish baths. I found a sort of restful anonymity in nakedness.

It couldn't last. The onset of winter drove me under cover. Beds grew scarcer. In the end, because I had no alternative, I slept for a whole week with a known criminal. That was asking for trouble. I was arrested in the first days of November 1942.

I spent a week in the Tolonzhaz—which was the House of Detention—and was then moved over to the Margit Prison for a proper going-over. In the interval, presumably, somebody had been making inquiries about me. The trouble was that I had told too many stories. When I now reverted to the simple truth, that

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I was a British officer, a prisoner of war, who had escaped from a prison camp in Poland nearly two years ago, it just got a big laugh.

In the New Year I was moved, with a few other prisoners. We weren't handcuffed, but there were more guards than prisoners. As the train was rattling along at quite a fast pace, through the wooded country south of Buda, I threw myself through the window. The guards made the mistake of trying to grab me instead of shooting me. By the time they had got hold of their guns again, I was rolling down the embankment and they had been carried past me. I don't know how soon they managed to stop the train, but by that time I was in the comparative safety of the woods, my clothes torn to bits, but myself all in one piece.

I walked through those woods by night for three nights. My sojourn in the Margit Korut hadn't made me any fitter, and on the morning of the fourth day, when I could only just crawl, I crawled into Lisa's garden.

Lisa Prinz's father is a professor of toxicology and a remarkable man. He fears no one and behaves according to his lights. I stayed there for six months, nominally hidden at the back of the loft, which was where my bed was put, but actually living as a member of the family.

I stayed six months because it took me that time to get fit. I had picked up some bug in prison which attacked my stomach. Professor Prinz injected me with different by-products of kaolin and insisted on my taking plenty of exercise. " If you lie about," he said, " it encourages the germs." So I chopped wood in the backyard. It was touch-and-go, but in the end this novel therapy won out, and I got back my weight and strength.

In early September I left them and walked through the country south of Pecs and down to the Drava, which is near the Yugoslav frontier. I swam the river one warm night, with my clothes in a bundle on my head, and dressed on the other bank. It was my third wartime frontier crossing and, as it turned out, much the easiest.

Here the first person I spoke to was an officer in my own Regiment, who had been seconded to the Partisans. I was taken to the coast and put back across the Adriatic in a returning M.T.B. Naturally nobody hurried themselves over me, and it was mid December before the wheels began to turn. I landed in Bari on Christmas Day 1943. Here I ran into someone with some sense, who put me straight onto an aeroplane and sent me back to England.

Some of this I told to Truë as we sat in the summer-house. The easy bits. When I reached the end I realized that I had two listeners. Besides Truë there was Lisa, who had perched herself on the bank behind the summer-house.

" If you've quite finished entertaining the jeune fille," she said, " I've got a message for you. Lady wants you."

In the hall I met Major Piper. He was coming down the stairs and looked pleased with himself. " Morning, Waters," he said.

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" If you've been talking to Lady, as I gather you have," I said, " you are perfectly well aware that my name is not Waters."

" Matter of fact," said the Major, " knew it all along. See you soon." He tripped away down the steps into the forecourt, whiffling his stick.

By the time I reached Lady I was in a cold temper. " Before you start telling me what I can do and what I can't do," I said belligerently, " let me tell you something. I've made up my mind. I'm going to see Thugutt tonight. All I want from you is a decent map and I can find my own way."

" Of course," said Lady. " But why a map? I had already arranged for a guide."

" Oh, you had, had you? " I said, feeling deflated, and looking for some further cause of offence. " About time, too " was all I could think of.

Lady grinned like a cat. It always pleased him to get someone on the wrong foot. " I think you will find the trip amusing. I understand that skill in rock climbing is one of your numerous accomplishments."

" When do I start? "

" Young Franz Schneidermeister is taking you. He will be here at seven o'clock."

Franz turned up to time and we set out. He was a pleasant youth, and had, as I soon noticed, all the tricks of the mountaineer's trade, including the deceptive, short-paced, shuffling stride which seems slovenly on the flat but takes you up mountains at a speed you need to be very fit indeed to keep up with.

He didn't talk a lot. We started by making a long cast back into the foothills, striking almost due west, and keeping off all roads. Then, very slowly, we veered south, and began to climb. We turned again, almost doubling back on our tracks, and began to climb steeply. Night had come, but the moon would not be up for another two hours. I kept one eye carefully on Franz's white shirt collar, which bobbed before me in the darkness like a rabbit's scut, and the other on my footholds. It was difficult to judge, but we seemed to be running head-on into a wall of rock.

Suddenly, incredulously, I found I was treading on railway sleepers. It wasn't old, disused line either. The metal rail of the single track was gleaming in the starlight.

Franz stopped for me to catch up with him and we squatted down beside each other.

" Where the hell does this line go? " I said. " And what construction gang of angels flew up here with it? Don't tell me it takes us through the mountains into Yugoslavia."

Franz was enjoying my bewilderment. " It goes through the mountains—yes. But not into Yugoslavia. No. We are in Yugoslavia already."

" Come again? "

" We crossed the frontier line ten minutes ago. It is not always along the peaks. Here it lies on this side." I knew enough about

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European style frontiers to realize that this might be true. Not all frontiers in Europe—in fact very few of them—are marked with fence lines. Usually they are invisible to the eye of anyone except the cartographer and the diplomat; and in mountain country the actual custom and control stations lie well back in the foothills.

"Where do we go from here, then?" I said. "And what's the snag?"

"The snag," said Franz, "is that." He indicated the cliff face which stretched across our front. It must have been the result of a geological fault. It looked sheer and dangerous. "If we go round it, we run into trouble. Guards at both ends. So we go through it."

"By the railway tunnel?"

"Yes."

"Sounds all right," I said. "Lead ôn."

"It is far from all right," said Franz seriously. "And you must listen very carefully to me and do what I say. First, you must understand, it is not a passenger line. It is a working line for the Goldener Kranz High Ore Mine. Second, if they did not need this ore very badly, I do not think the tunnel would be used at all. It is more than a mile long and has no ventilation except at the ends. There is a pump which drives the air along, but that does not always work. Last year a train broke down. The driver and his assistant were both dead when they reached them."

I swallowed twice and said, "All right. We'll just have to hope the ventilation doesn't break down tonight."

"That is not the greatest danger," said Franz. "One of the reasons we made such a long detour was so that I could watch for trains. It is a single track. There is only one engine used. If we had seen a train go past, in either direction, we should have been safe for six hours."

"I didn't notice any train," I said thoughtfully.

"No," said Franz. "No train. We just take a chance, yes?"

"Do they run at night?"

"Sometimes at night, sometimes by day. There is no time-table. If a train comes, you must throw yourself forward, quite flat, against the side of the wall. You will be in the angle, you understand. There is no room to lie beside the track. And throw your arms above your head. That way you will occupy less space."

I looked hard at Franz to see if he was joking. He seemed quite serious. When we reached the tunnel I began to believe him. The people who had cut it had not wasted an inch. The engines were diesel-electric, and there was no smoke-disposal problem and therefore very little head-room. There was very little room anywhere. The tunnel had simply been tailored to fit the engine.

"We walk on the right," said Franz. After that we stopped talking and started walking.

Whether the air-drive was working or not I don't know, but before I had gone a hundred paces I was pouring with sweat. It was easy going, if somewhat lop-sided. My left foot was on the

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sleepers; my right in the very narrow channel between the end of the sleepers and the wall.

The darkness was more than absolute. It seemed to take on a positive quality of its own. If you shut out every scrap of light from a room, and then shut your eyes, and then put a black cloth over your head, you would get a notion of it. When I looked down at my watch the figures were startlingly bright. We had been walking for ten minutes. It was at that moment that I knew a train was coming.

At first I had thought it was my imagination. I had been hearing trains inside my head ever since I got into the tunnel. Then I found that I could see Franz. A faint glow of light was diffusing the absolute darkness.

Then the rail began to shake beside my foot.

When Franz looked back over his shoulder, it was light enough to make out the expression on his face, and I saw, with a sick start, that he was afraid. I realized suddenly that all his glib talk about the tunnel was second hand. He had never been this way before; or else he had never been caught in it.

"Could we not run?" he said.

"Useless," I said sharply. "It's travelling five times as fast as we are. We'll do just what you said. And get down *now*. We don't want to be spotted."

I thought to myself that being seen was the least of the dangers. The engine carried a single headlamp, slung rather high; and even if the driver had been looking down, the edge of the track must have been in bewildering shadow.

I was flat on my face, half of me pressed against the wall, and half against the granite chips of the rail bed. I wished that I had had a few minutes to scratch out even the shallowest of graves

Noise, and more noise.

Light and the smell of hot metal.

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Alphabet forwards. Alphabet backwards. Kings and Queens of England. Things I have said all my life, when waiting to be hurt. I reached William and Mary before the engine got there . . .

The only thing I was not prepared for was the built-up pressure wave, which hit me and, I thought for a wild moment, actually lifted me clear of the ground.

A hot iron finger passed up my back.

Then a roaring diminuendo; and comparative silence.

Shakily, we climbed to our feet. Ten minutes later we were in the open. My coat was hanging loose from my shoulders. Some projection from the engine had caught it and ripped it from hem to collar. I rolled it into a ball and hid it in the bushes.

" Now we climb," said Franz. It was a difficult little piece of work and it put us both back into humour with ourselves. We were climbing sideways out of the mouth of the tunnel—presumably to avoid a guard post in the opening of the valley.

Following Franz was a pleasure. Once or twice, to start with, he looked back at me, but as soon as he saw that I could handle myself he went straight ahead. There was a piece of chimney work near the top that wouldn't have been out of place on the Tiger's route on Clogwyn Du-r-Arddu. Soon I could feel the summit ahead of me, and the soft breeze of dawn.

We rested for ten minutes. Then we started slowly down. When we came out of the woods, the dawn was on us. The sky lightened and a streak of red ran across the eastern horizon; then, with almost tropical speed, the sun was up, chasing the long black shadows to the west.

I noticed that we had come to the top of a man-made pasture. Lower down, peeping from a fold in the ground, was a chimney.

It was a log cabin, solidly but prettily built, with carved and painted shutters, standing on a shelf, one end cut back into the lee of the rock. A pocket handkerchief of flower garden spilt down from the open side.

I was so enchanted by the picture it made that I did not at once realize that Franz was worried. " What is it? " I said.

" Why no smoke? "

" Perhaps they are not up. It's very early."

" There should be smoke," said Franz.

We slithered down the stony path and went up to the door. Franz knocked. There was complete silence. He turned a very white face. " There's something wrong," he said. " He has a dog. A wolf-hound. He at least would have heard us."

" Perhaps they are away." I was whispering, too.

Franz pushed on the door. It swung open. The main room was quite empty, the fire cold. For form's sake we climbed into the attic, and then came down and looked into the lean-to. Then we came out again, and looked at each other.

" I hope," said Franz. " I hope . . ." He stopped, and added quickly, " There was a little girl, you see."

I had known for some minutes. Now I was coldly certain.

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It took us an hour to find them. They were in a shallow grave under the turf at the bottom of the garden, the child and the dog with them. They cannot have been more than twelve hours dead. They looked very peaceful.

We put the turf back and let them lie. It was a pleasant place, and they were together.

In the early afternoon we started back . . .

o

When I got to the castle, I went up to my room and shaved and changed my shirt. Then I made for the operations room. The ante-room was empty, but I heard a voice speaking from the sanctuary, and went in.

It was Gheorge, sitting at Lady's desk and looking a bit like the office boy who has been left in charge while all the bosses are on holiday. Gheorge grinned quickly when he saw me and then went on talking.

Someone at the other end of the line seemed to be worried. It was one of those booming telephones and I heard a good round German voice saying that something " must be stopped. If it isn't stopped at once there will be trouble." Gheorge said, " Certainly, certainly. Herr Lady was down right now talking to the Chief of Police." Then he rang off.

" What's the trouble? " I said.

" There's always trouble," said Gheorge. " Last night they had a political meeting in the Sportplatz. There was a fight. Windows got broken."

" Doesn't sound a great deal to get excited about," I said.

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"No. But when it was over there was a dead man. His head had been knocked in."

"And you think the row was staged to cover his killing?"

"We are sure of it. He was one of Schneidermeister's men. The second to go in a week."

The telephone rang again. This time it was Lady. Gheorge told him that I was back. I thought Lady sounded a little surprised, but it may have been the telephone. He asked to speak to me.

"I'm glad you are back," he said. "Will you please tell Gheorge everything that happened? Good or bad."

"Most of it was bad," I said.

Lady ignored this. "Tell it to him slowly," he said, "and see that he makes notes. When you have finished, come down to Steinbrückl, I am at the Hirsch. I have a job for you. Are you willing?"

"I'm a little worn," I said. "As long as it isn't too energetic, I expect I'll make out."

"Very well," said Lady. "In one hour, then."

Then Gheorge got out his notebook, and I talked to him. He seemed to think our adventure in the tunnel funny. "When I went that way I had no trouble," he said. "Perhaps I am thinner than you." The scene at the cabin did not seem to shock him.

I found Lady in the foyer of the Hirsch. "You know we have been having trouble here?" he said.

"Gheorge told me something about it."

"Good. Do you know a man called Wachs?"

"I've seen him."

"Has he seen you?"

I reflected. "I don't think so. I've no reason to think so; no."

"Could you make friends with him?"

"Make friends with him," I said doubtfully. "I don't think he's a very friendly character. But there is one person who already knows him quite well. Mitzi. I don't know her real name. Major Piper's secretary."

"Yes," said Lady. "I fear she would not be of much assistance to us. She is not reliable."

"You mean she has been seduced by the enemy?"

"I do not think it was a question of seduction. She has worked for them from the beginning. That was why they procured her a job in Major Piper's office. And instructed her to make herself available to him."

"Does he know?"

"Of course."

I felt that I was being stupid. "If he knows, why hasn't he got rid of her?"

"Why should he? They would only attempt to place another one. That one he might not know about. He would be worse off then. Surely that is obvious."

It sounded about as obvious as *Alice Through the Looking-Glass.*

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I said, " I'll see what I can do. I can't promise anything. It's just possible I might be able to get a line on Wachs through the friend of a friend."

" Splendid," said Lady, and added insincerely, " Don't get into trouble."

As soon as I left him I made for the Mariankirche. Messelen had a big wooden bowl of bird-seed in his hand and was feeding his birds. We talked about nothing in particular until he had finished.

Then I told him what I wanted.

" I know Herr Wachs," he said, " and like him not at all. Why do you wish to know him better? And why do you wish me to help you? "

I had, of course, seen that this one would come and had given a certain amount of thought to it. I had decided on a limited amount of plain speaking.

" I've been sent out here," I said, " by our Government, to keep an eye on things. There has been trouble in this town—"

" Steinbrückl was constructed by nature for trouble," agreed Messelen.

" Naturally, I don't want this talked about. But equally I can't ask your help unless I tell you what I am doing."

" You are Secret Service? "

" I am accredited to the British Foreign Office for Intelligence work."

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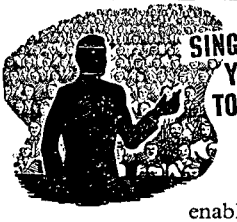

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" That means Secret Service? "

" If you insist."

Messelen said, " I do not think I shall help you."

I must have looked a bit blank, because he added, " There are two reasons. First, I do not like trouble. I had plenty of trouble in the war. I want no more. Second, I am a businessman. What you propose does not go well with business. I may wish to sell Herr Wachs a tractor. What then? "

" I don't think he is an agriculturalist," I said. " Never mind. Will you forget what I said? "

" I will forget it. And I will give you a piece of advice. Go to the post office." I could only assume that this was some sort of code. I looked blank but receptive.

" In most German towns the centre of the black market is outside the post office. There are men who seem to have no business but to hang about there all day and talk to people and make telephone calls. Herr Wachs is usually there. His associates also."

" I'll try it," I said. I'd been past the post office half a dozen times before without noticing anything in particular, but when I used my eyes I could see at once what Messelen meant. Like most German post offices it had a fairly large outer foyer with four telephone kiosks and a couple of benches. There were half a dozen men hanging round. I found myself a seat in an Espresso across the way and watched. People came and went, but there were three regulars. Wachs was one. A tall, thin man in a Panama hat was another. A third was a dapper little type with a dark chin and a face like a circus clown.

I was engrossed in watching them but suddenly I became aware, without looking round, that someone had sat down at my table. It was Messelen.

" Come to see the fun? "

" I've changed my mind," said Messelen. " I have been making some inquiries on your behalf. I have ascertained where they go in the evenings. It is a small cinema, called the Blue Cinema, near the outskirts of the town. I have been there once only, but I recollect that it is on the ground floor of a big building with an office block above it. Also I think there is some sort of club in the rooms behind it."

" Not bad, for one visit."

" I remember it," said Messelen seriously, " because it occurred to me at the time that it was one of the least attractive places I have ever set eyes on."

" It sounds terrific," I said. " What is your plan? "

" Not my plan. Yours. I bring you information. You make the plan."

I thought hard for a moment. The trouble was that I was uncertain how much of what Lady had told me was confidential and how much was common knowledge. I compromised. " What we think," I said, " is that Wachs & Co. are not only racketeers. They've got a political slant as well. The idea is that the Russians

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may be using them. You know that there is a regular border traffic from here into Hungary and Yugoslavia. There are probably a lot of people involved, but one of the big crowds—a crowd which was, incidentally, very helpful to us—has lost two good men in a week."

"So," said Messelen. He sat staring at me. I would have given a lot to know what was going on behind his wooden face. "I heard something. The last death, I thought, came of the riots."

"The suggestion is that the riot was stage-managed to cover the killing."

"It would be a well-worn technique. Now, what comes of all this?"

"My ideas are still flexible. But it did occur to me that someone of the group—Wachs, if he is the head of it—must some time report to his contact. If we could find out who that contact is, it would be a step in the right direction."

"It would be a big step. But—I do not wish to exaggerate—almost impossible. These men have a thousand contacts. Their business is contacts. You saw them at work this morning. There are many different ways they could meet an agent to receive orders or pass on information. They could write to him, telephone him, meet him in the street, at the cinema . . ." He paused for a moment and our eyes met.

"I wonder," I said. "There must be some reason for choosing a cinema as their meeting-place. It's mad, of course. But it would work. You go in separately when the place is half empty, sit at the back of the circle, talk to your heart's content. Are you game for a visit with me?"

For quite a long time, Messelen sat silent and looking out of the window. In the light of early evening his normally pleasant face had a grim, set look. Wachs & Co. had disappeared and the square was almost empty.

"All right," said Messelen. "I'll come with you, but one thing I insist on. You must change your clothes. It is not a high-class place."

"What do you suggest?"

"Something old, but not too shabby. Can you find such clothes?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then we will meet at my flat. Tomorrow? Very well. At eight o'clock it will be beginning to be dark. And one other thing. Have you a gun?"

"I'm afraid not. I might be able to borrow that too, but I'm no sort of shot."

Messelen looked surprised. His ideas of the British Secret Service had evidently received a blow. "I will see if I can find you a gun," he said.

In the end I decided it would be better if I took Gheorge into my confidence. I asked him to get me the outfit.

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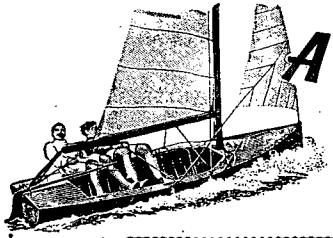

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"All right," he said. "When do you want it?"

"By tomorrow evening. We're aiming to get to the cinema some time after eight."

"I'll have the stuff in your bedroom by six o'clock."

"I'd be obliged if you could handle it yourself. The less people who know about this the better, I should think."

"You don't mind if I tell Lady?"

"Not even him," I said firmly.

Gheorge looked as if he was going to object, then broke into one of his rare smiles. "I can see," he said, "that you are beginning to have a proper appreciation of our work."

It was a few minutes before eight on the following evening when I knocked at Messelen's door. He was standing beside the table cleaning the grease off a small automatic pistol.

"It's a Mauser Kindchen," he said. He showed me how the clip went into the handle, and I loaded it once or twice to get the hang of it. "I should judge that its most effective range is two paces."

"That sounds just my style," I said. I put it in my coat pocket, where it swung a little, but felt comforting.

Messelen was wearing an old black suit. He looked as solid and as reliable as the Rock of Gibraltar. "Here's my plan for this evening," he said. "Unless you have anything better to offer? No? Then we'll go in my car which we park near at hand but I rather think not *too* near. There is an alleyway about a hundred

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yards short of the cinema—I went down this afternoon to have a look. From there we will walk along and join the audience. If we see Wachs, or anyone else that we recognize we will try to keep in sight of where they are sitting and follow them if they leave."

"And at the end of the performance?"

"I had it in mind that it would be better if we came out just before the end. One to watch and one to bring the car up. We should then be in a position to follow, whatever happens."

"That sounds all right," I said. And added, "What I really mean is that it sounds absolutely mad, but I agree that it's the best we can do. We certainly don't want to get behind Wachs and breathe down the back of his neck."

"I have discovered something about the other two men you saw. The little one who behaves like a clown is an Italian from Carinthia and his name is Tino. No one knows much about him except that he does no work, and has a lot of money, and spends it all on girls."

"What about the tall one?"

"He is a less pleasant character. His real name I could not discover. He is known as the Markgraf. And his speciality is the knife."

"Wachs, Tino, and the Markgraf," I said, thoughtfully. "I can really imagine nobody I would rather spend a quiet evening without. Let's get going quickly or I shall come to my senses and return home to bed."

His car, a handy little black Opel, was garaged at the end of the close. As we backed out and turned into the main road, the great bell of the Mariankirche was announcing the half-hour. The main streets were brightly lit, but almost empty. When we turned off towards the eastern quarter the street lighting ceased. At first there were one or two lighted shop fronts. Then even those fell behind, and we had to use our own lights discreetly.

"Here is the place," said Messelen. He had called it an alley; it was really an open courtyard between two tall buildings. We ran into it, switched off, and locked the car.

"Down this street, right at the end, and then—hullo, what's this?" Messelen, who was walking ahead, stopped so suddenly that I bumped into him.

"What is it?"

"Police cars."

We had reached the first corner, and looked round it. In the next street three cars and a tender were parked nose to tail. There was a driver in the first one. The others seemed to be empty.

We crossed the road and strolled down the farther pavement. The driver looked blankly ahead of him, but I knew he had seen us.

"Don't like it," said Messelen. "What are they up to?"

Before we got to the second corner, Messelen said, "Down here. Don't hurry." He seemed to have a surprising knowledge of the by-ways of Steinbrückl. The alley we had got in to twisted and

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turned until I had lost all sense of direction; then we were looking out into a better-class street.

The Blue Cinema lay some twenty yards up and on the opposite side of the road. Across the road, between us and the lighted foyer, was a barrier of trestles. There were half a dozen Austrian policemen there, and they were stopping everyone who went by. Farther up the street, beyond the cinema, was a second barrier. Across the side street which ran down behind the cinema was a police car, and there were policemen at the front and side entrances.

As we watched, a man and woman came out. They seemed surprised at the reception committee. A few questions, and they were passed along to the barrier. Someone wrote something down, the barrier opened, and they went through.

"It must be quite a film," I said.

Messelen said nothing. I could tell that he was worried. Presently he touched me on the arm and we crept back the way we had come.

When we were safely in the car I said—the relief in my voice was probably only too evident—"Well, that's the end of that. Since the local force has chosen tonight for a Cleaner Films Drive, there doesn't seem to be a lot we can do."

"Tell me. Who exactly have you taken into your confidence about our trip tonight?"

"A character called Gheorge. He's Lady's personal assistant. I had to tell him roughly what I was up to, to get hold of this outfit."

"I see." Messelen's breath came out slowly.

"Just what are you getting at?" I said patiently. "Do you suppose that immediately my back was turned Gheorge rang up the local police and asked them to parade three deep round the cinema just to prevent us getting in? Why should he? And even if he had asked them, why should they have done it?"

"I just don't believe in coincidences," said Messelen. I had never heard his voice so ugly.

"Whether you believe in them or not," I started to say, felt his hand on my arm, and stopped short. Then I heard them, too. Measured footsteps coming in our direction from the cinema. They came nearer, hesitated at the corner, and swung towards us.

"Duck," said Messelen. There wasn't much room in the car, but we got our heads down as far as we could.

The steps came slowly up to us, went past. I could hear three men. The smell of cigar smoke drifted into the car.

"So you don't believe in coincidences," I said into Messelen's ear, which was a few inches from my mouth.

"Get out quietly. See if you can spot their car. I'll be turning. Catch you up." By the time I was out, the three men were gone. I ran to the corner, and looked up the street. They were moving, quite slowly, away from me; Wachs I would have known anywhere, and the tall knife expert; the third man was a stranger.

Messelen had turned his car, and its bonnet came to rest by my

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left elbow. "I'll follow on foot," I said. "When I've gone a reasonable distance, bring the car up to me."

"Das Bockspringen. Good."

"If they turn a corner I'll wait for you. The only trouble is they may hear the car starting and stopping behind them."

"They're talking pretty hard. I think it's the only way."

I scudded after them. That part wasn't difficult. There were three of them in boots, going slowly. I was in rubber soles and alone. Once, when the road forked, I thought I had lost them but Wachs's blessed cigar suddenly shone out like a beacon.

The trouble was I could hear Messelen's car every time it started and stopped. I was nearer, of course, and was listening for it, but I wondered it didn't penetrate their talk. Once I thought it had. They all stopped and seemed to look back and listen. At that moment we had a stroke of luck. Three lorries rolled past. By the time they had got by, Messelen was up with me, his engine safely switched off.

"I've got a feeling they're wise to us," I said.

"Don't think so," said Messelen.

"Then why have they stopped?"

"My guess would be their car's near here. I was right. Jump in. Now we're off."

A pencil of light crept out of a side turn and swung away from us. It was a big old-fashioned machine. So much I could see in the silhouette of its own lights.

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As soon as the three men were aboard, it swung away, gathering speed as it went. How we hung on I know not. We never, of course, used our own lights. I had time to notice that we were going east, out of the town and towards the frontier; and that we seemed to be passing through an interminable area of vineyard. Then we were clear, and climbing. The white road unrolled, the red light ahead of us swayed and darted like an uncertain shooting star.

Then it blinked, slowed, and disappeared.

Messelen trod on his brake, and we pulled up in a swirl of our own dust.

"It's a private house," I croaked. "Driveway. Some sort of lodge gates."

"Must get clear of the road," said Messelen. "See if you can find an opening." I scrambled out and ran back. A short way down the road I found a field gate. It was wired, but I lifted the wire off and pushed it open. Inside there was a rutty track which looked as if it would take a small car.

Messelen was already backing. A neat turn, and he brought her in. I shut the gate behind him and got back into the car.

"Run fifty yards and stop," I said. The track swung in towards the house, and I thought for a moment it was going to bring us back into the grounds. Then I saw that there was a thick belt of wood ahead of us. We stopped under a tree, and as soon as the engine was switched off, the silence and the darkness dropped back over us like a warm cloak.

I said, "It looks as if we may have pulled a fifty-to-one chance out of the hat. We can't be more than a couple of miles from the frontier. A lonely house like this, in its own wood—"

"It is possible," said Messelen.

"You don't sound terribly happy about it."

"I dislike the obvious. Let's find out where we are. There's a map in the door pocket on your side."

I found the map and handed it to Messelen. He unfolded it onto his knee and turned on the dashboard light, which gave a single flicker and went out.

On such small things hang our lives . . .

"Bulb," said Messelen. "Curse." He fumbled in his pocket, pulled out a cigarette-lighter, and clicked it on. It wasn't much use for reading maps by. The yellow flame jumped and flickered. Then I remembered.

"I've got a torch," I said, breathlessly. "Gheorge insisted I take one. Sensible chap, Gheorge. Hold on a moment."

The light from my torch cut across Messelen's hand, onto the map.

"Where did you get that lighter?"

"Curious, is it not?" said Messelen. "But pleasant. A girl gave it to me. Hold the light steady."

My hand was shaking. I snapped off the light.

"What is it?"

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"It sounded," I said, with a conscious effort, "like footsteps. Might have been imagination." But I knew it was not imagination. I was out on my own now, and everything was real.

Very gently I eased open the door on my side of the car. Then I bent across to Messelen and whispered, scarcely moving my lips, "Watch that patch of darkness ahead." He nodded, and I stepped out onto the grass.

The blood was drumming such a devil's tattoo in my head that I could hear nothing outside.

I moved round, came back again on Messelen's side, slipped my hands through the open window of the car, and got him round the neck.

★ ***The Third Part of "Be Shot For Sixpence," by Michael Gilbert, appears in next month's Argosy on sale May 10.***

SOLUTION to PUZZLE CORNER on page 30

1. *a. The Duke of Wellington b. Lord Byron*
2. *Theodore Roosevelt*
3. *a. Three-quarters of an inch b. ten*
4. *The inscription on it furnished the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics*
5. *a. Knutsford (Mrs. Gaskell) b. Winchester (Trollope) c. Dorchester (Hardy) d. Fowey (Quiller-Couch)*
6. *a. Bellerophon b. Bacchanals c. God encompasses us d. O mihi beate Martine*
7. *a.* 1,000 *years b. About* 6 *million million miles*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 8, *Parole.* 2, *Indiaman.* 10, *Recant.* 11, *Lausanne.* 12, *Ova.* 13, *Merino.* 14, *Intimate.* 16, *Flatten.* 18, *Awesome.* 23, *Plectrum.* 27, *Napkin.* 28, *Bud.* 29, *Immenser.* 30, *Scroll.* 31, *Presages.* 32, *Crowns.*

Down. 1, *Harebell.* 2, *Vocalist.* 3, *Ten to one.* 4, *Villain.* 5, *Adjust.* 6, *Salaam.* 7, *Gannet.* 15, *Ire.* 17, *Tit.* 19, *Wind-sock.* 20, *Superior.* 21, *Mainland.* 22, *Ambrose.* 24, *Lemurs.* 25, *Cheese.* 26, *Resign.*

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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Solution on Page 143

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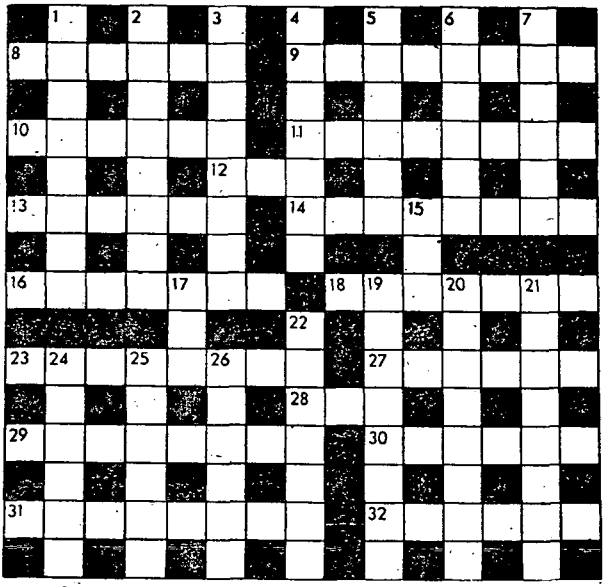

CLUES

Across

8 My word! father has a part to play (6).

9 P. & O. ship (8).

10 The Vicar of Bray did more than once (6).

11 Saul's upset, a girl's after him in Switzerland (8).

12 Roman eggs ? (3).

13 Sheep that spins a fine yarn (6).

14 Drop a hint for a close friend (8).

16 But rollers by the shore do not do this to the waves (7).

18 Wee Amos, somehow (7).

23 It makes the strings sound (8).

27 Junior nap (6).

28 " Concealment like a worm i' the ——" (Shakespeare) (3).

29 Huger, as Alice might have said ? (8).

30 Book found round about the Dead Sea (6).

31 Before the wise men ? (8).

32 Coins of monarchy (6).

Down

1 Jug the head and ring the tail (8).

2 Can't play but can sing (8).

3 Odds against the 12.50 being punctual ? (3, 2, 3).

4 Ill in vain (7).

5 Make to fit properly (6).

6 Eastern hail (6).

7 Sea goose (6).

15 Reversed in 13 across or 20 down (3).

17 It's a little bird either way (3).

19 Acts as a vane on the airfield (4-4).

20 One of the better lakes (8).

21 Orkney island oddly named (8).

22 He comes from some bar (7).

24 Cousins of the monkeys (6).

25 " He made his friends believe the moon to be made of green ——" (Erasmus) (6).

26 Write your name again or give up your place (6).

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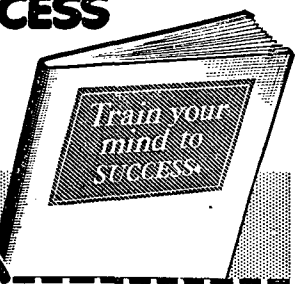

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Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it. . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested. I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.

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